

The Father's Joy - The parable of the Prodigal Son

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 September 2026

Preacher: Dov

[0:00] But for this morning, or for our sermon, we're going to be studying the parable of the prodigal son from Luke 15. And the title for today's message is The Father's Joy.

The Father's Joy. And the main idea is that God joyfully receives repentant sinners, and He calls self-righteous sinners to join the celebration.

So A.W. Tozer, in his masterful book, The Knowledge of the Holy, he starts out the book by saying that what the most important, what comes into our minds when we think about God, is the most important thing about us.

So this morning, we're going to be thinking about the nature of God, about the nature of God as our Heavenly Father. And I want us especially to observe what brings God joy and what grieves God's heart.

So in today's message, we're going to see something beautiful about the character of God. We're going to see that God gives grace, grace to the humble and opposes the proud.

[1:22] That He rejoices when sinners repent and turn back to Him. And that He lovingly confronts and even entreats the self-righteous sinner who stands outside of His joy.

And my prayer this morning is that we'd be, yes, captivated by the mercy of God.

But that we'd also see and confess and repent of any scraps of rebellion that are left inside of our hearts, or any inklings of self-righteousness that still dwell within us.

And that whether you've wandered far away from the Father like the younger son, like the younger brother, or sit outside in self-righteousness like the older brother, that you'd find your way home to the Father this morning.

So let me read the passage, and let's pray. Luke 15, 11 to 32. And he said, There was a man who had two sons.

[2:37] And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of the property that's coming to me. And he divided his property between them. And many days later, the younger son gathered all that he had and took a journey into a far country.

And there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate.

And no one gave him anything. 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. I will arise and go to my father, and I'll say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

[3:51] I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. 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.

And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. 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 and bring the fattened calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate.

For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field.

And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

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

[5:19] His father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I've served you and I never disobeyed your command.

You never gave me a goat, a young goat that I might suffer with my friends. When the son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.

And he said to him, Son, you are always with me and all that is mine, all that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found. God, would you bless now.

Holy God, would you bless now the preaching of your word. All right, to start out this morning, I want to provide some context to this parable, the story of the prodigal son.

[6:23] So let's consider, first of all, what is the book of Luke about and where is the parable of the prodigal son featured in the book of Luke? So, first, the gospel of Luke was written to demonstrate that Jesus had come to seek and save the lost.

The gospel was written for both Jews and Gentiles alike and over and over again Jesus seeks to demonstrate or Luke seeks to demonstrate God's aim in Christ to bring tax collectors and the poor and outcasts and sinners and women and Jews and yes, Gentiles into the kingdom of God.

That's the book as a whole. So where is the parable of the prodigal son located? It's located in Luke 15. Where the, where it starts with the Pharisees grumbling against Jesus because Jesus is allowing sinners to come and be with him and eat with him.

So in essence, in this parable, Jesus is confronting the Pharisees suffering his hearts by demonstrating just how much joy there is in God over even one sinner who repents.

And it's literally being taught by someone, by Jesus, who is walking his way to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem. And what's going to happen in Jerusalem? Jesus will be killed.

[8:02] He will sacrifice his life even for sinners that are described in this, in this passage. So let's listen closely to what Jesus has to say because these words are truly precious.

He is walking on his way to his death. So in studying this passage together, I want to examine it in three acts. Three acts. first, deserting the father.

Then act two, returning to the father. Then act three, refusing the father. So the first act, deserting the father. Observe verses 11 to 16.

A couple thoughts. First, notice how, notice carefully how the prodigal son, he commits a great offense. He forgets the riches and benefits of being his father's son.

The prodigal wanted to pursue reckless living and he thought the rebellious sin would make him happy and sin far away from the presence of his father rather than living in the nearness and care and authority of his dad.

[9:20] So in essence, the younger son preaches with his life, give me what you owe me so I can be happy without you. The tragedy of the younger son's rebellion is not simply that he left home, it's that he left a good father.

And before we throw too many stones at the younger brother, I want you all to think, how many of you were like this?

How many of you pursued satisfaction and pleasure and in relationships and in work success away from the father? How foolish you were, how ignorant you were, how like C.S. Lewis would put it, you were making mud pies in the sand.

And even today, how often do you functionally live like a prodigal? As if living far from God and not under his caring government, as if that would make you happy.

Maybe you never say it out loud, but sometimes your life says, I know what the Bible says, but I want to decide for myself what I watch or what I fantasize about or what relationships I have.

[10:50] And note, the greatest evil in this type of sin isn't the pure disobedience. It's what you're preaching with your life and believing about God.

Sin is not merely breaking God's rules. Sin is preferring God's gifts to God himself. And when you sin in open rebellion and presumptive sins, you're saying that God isn't the source of all joy, that walking closely to him doesn't satisfy.

It's like taking Psalm 16, ripping it out of your Bible, crossing it out, writing a big fat red no on top.

God. Think about the next time, think about that, the next time you answer your bathroom with your phone for 15 minutes of prodigal relief.

Or you text a friend after Sunday with a prayer request for somebody who didn't seem quite right on Sunday. prodigal joys are false joys.

[12 : 09] Only being near the father will satisfy your soul. So that's act one, deserting the father.

Let's move on to act two, returning to the father. Verse 17 begins with, but when he came to himself, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have more than upbred, but I perish here with hunger.

Act two begins with the returning of the prodigal son when he came to himself, when he woke up and realized that he in and of himself was lost, he was poor, he was destitute, he was hungry. Picture him there, empty pockets, an empty stomach, standing in a field full of pigs, looking for food, and looking at the food in their trough and realizing that he has nowhere else to turn.

And it's there, at the very bottom, that he comes to himself. He remembers that his father was rich, and even his father's hired hands have more than enough bread.

[13 : 23] bread. And isn't this what grace, I mean, thank God for grace that taught our hearts to fear. Isn't that what grace does for us so much?

It brings us to our senses. It opens our eyes to what sin has actually done to you. It exposes your poverty, your emptiness, your hunger, and it makes you realize that you need God to save you. And if anyone's here today and they never realize that, or they don't even feel that they're, if anyone's not walking with the Lord, but they don't even feel like they're at rock bottom, well, wake up, realize that you are spiritually poor, destitute, bankrupt even, and in need of rescuing. and realize that God has an overflowing feast of forgiveness and fellowship prepared for you, if you will repent.

All right, then, continuing on with the parable. The parable is reminded of the lavish affection and care of the Father. Let's just pull apart, let's just tease apart God's love as shown in this passage.

[14 : 52] So, first, while the younger son was still a long way off, his father saw him. Then the father runs to the son, and then the father embraces and kisses him.

And then the father's response to the son's confession, what does he do? He slams him. No, no, no, the best robe, the family ring, shoes on his feet, a fattened calf, a celebration, and an exclamation, my son was dead and alive again.

He was lost and is found. I don't think that Jesus could have portrayed a more exuberantly happy father than this, a father who saw his son who was lost and who has now repented and is found. So it's a father that really depicts the rest of Luke 15 flawlessly. Earlier in Luke 15, 15, 7, Luke writes, just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

And then Luke 15, 10, just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner, one sinner, who repents.

[16 : 15] The younger son, he was destitute and he cost his father a whole lot. But what's the father's reaction? What's the father's response to his son's repentance? It is relief, joy, love.

The father doesn't stand on his porch with his arms crossed, waiting for an apology. He sees the son, he runs to the son, he throws his arms around him, he kisses the boy who smells like the far country.

Christian, think back to your conversion. Do you realize that when you repented of your sin and trusted in Christ, that God the father responded like this to you?

and it's raised an important question. How can God, how can a holy God receive sinners like this? How can the father embrace the rebellious without simply pretending the rebellion didn't happen? Well, Luke's going to answer that question as we continue to march towards Jerusalem. But I'll give you a foretaste.

[17 : 32] the father can receive repentance sinners, and we know all this, but not because sin doesn't matter, but because Jesus is going to Jerusalem to bear the cost of bringing sinners home to God.

So just think about it. Just linger under the lavish affection of God for you. And awaken again to the fact that you were, that you are, and that you always will be an object of the father's mercy.

More on that later. So that's act two, returning to the father. And if only the story ended there, that'd be great, but it doesn't.

Jesus has more for us to get out of the story than just that. So let's continue to dig. Now about act three, refusing the father.

Oh, the mistakes of the older son. First mistake. Notice the older son's reaction to the news of his brother and especially his party. He was angry.

[18:54] He refused to go in. Think back. Remember how the younger son was outside the father's house because he ran away from the father?

The older son is now outside the dad's house as well because he refuses to come in. and if that weren't enough to grieve his father, look at how he breaks his father's heart.

The father comes out to him and entreats him. In the original language, entreats suggests tenderly and persistently entreats the boy, the self-righteous older brother.

And what does the older son say? I've served you for many years. I never disobeyed you and yet you never gave me a celebration.

This son, he was bitter at his brother and ultimately at his father. As the younger brother's former life preached a desire to live apart from the father, the older brother self-righteously says, I stayed and served you, so why haven't you given me more?

[20:12] One wants the father's things without the father. The other serves the father primarily to get the father's things. But neither, at least initially, simply says, I just want the father.

And that's destructive for us. Because it's so easy to slip into an older brother attitude. and that's characterized by grumbling and anger and judgmentalism and bitterness.

So think about that, what that could mean for like a Sunday morning. On a Sunday morning, you drive up to church, you see the greeter, the greeter smiling at you, but it's sure it's a little disheveled.

And you kind of make a note of that in your heart. And then you get to the children's ministry area, you're registering your kids for children's ministry, and the line's long. And you kind of murmur in your heart, man, I wish the elders would figure out a better process for this.

Then you come into the sanctuary and the music starts. And someone raises their hand and prays. And you wonder, are they really sincere? And then the sermon starts.

[21:33] And it's a really good sermon for my spouse to hear. And it goes on and on. And you've just spent the entire morning inside the father's house while your heart is standing outside with your arms crossed.

So picture that as a backdrop. It's the experience of Sunday morning for the repentance sinner. For the ones that know, that knows that they are an object of mercy, have been forgiven much.

They're just grateful. They're driving up to church, they're grateful to go to worship with God's people. They're grateful for someone to watch their kids. They're grateful for a chance to sing to the Lord.

They're excited and hungry to hear God's word for themselves. themselves. How do we describe this person? The repentant sinner, the object of mercy, is humble and joyful and really just aware of how kind God has been to let him spend time in God's presence with God's people.

Now, sure, it's obvious which one is the more accurate reflection of what the Father is like. Yet it's so easy to become focused on ourselves and the failures of everyone else around us.

[23:07] We forget the mercy that brought us into the Father's house in the first place. Who's had, who's experienced the most mercy from God?

Well, I have. That's the heart. That's the attitude of an object of mercy. So, if you saw yourself at all in the humorous but sometimes sadly accurate picture of the older brother coming to church, be warned.

If you saw yourself in that picture of self-righteousness, I plead with you, confess that to the Lord. That's a sin just as much as any kind of rebellious, presumptuous living that we need mercy from the Father for.

So, acknowledge the sin of him, ask me to have mercy on you for that. For truly, you're no better than a Pharisee yourself. I really know better than a tax collector and a rebellious sinner.

All right, but for now, let's end the parable where Jesus ends it with the accent on the father's rejoicing. Let's look at Luke 15, 31 to 32.

[24:27] And he said to him, Son, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this year, brother was dead and is alive.

He was lost and is found. Again, what a merciful father. A father who doesn't slam, doesn't tear down either of his kids when he really could have.

One for reckless living and the other for self-righteous smugness. At the same time, God is celebratory to the repentant rebel and he's entreating to the self-righteous.

So that's the story. So where do we go from here? Well, I think God has application for two types of people in the room today that I think specifically he wants to address. So the first is anyone who is carrying resentment.

And the second is anyone who's stuck in an older brother attitude. So first, for those who are carrying resentment, and I share this out of love because sin, as we saw earlier, sin pollutes the heart.

[25:50] Sin brings sadness. Sin takes us away from the presence of the Father. So just lean in to this. If you're carrying resentment, think about this.

Who might you be resentful at right now? Maybe you're frustrated. at a relative or a friend, maybe even a spouse. When you think about them, you feel agitation.

When your mind's idle, your thoughts gravitate towards things they did wrong, or maybe you even argue with them in your head. Friends, if you're in this situation, ask yourself, what are you more aware of at this moment?

the deficiencies of that person were of God's mercy toward you.

Are you living in the great mercy of the Matthew 18 sized debt? Remember Matthew 18, the great debt that's been canceled against us or canceled from us?

[27:08] Are you forgetting how you once, how you once lived in reckless living or maybe just in ignorant avoidance of God? And how now you even continue to sin against him with hard thoughts and agitation and maybe even envy at others who seem to have the perfect relationship and the perfect life and the perfect Facebook life?

well, if you're carrying resentment today, today's an opportunity to repent and to look at our provident God who has placed you in this relationship.

Take a moment to remember what do you believe about God right now and what is your life preaching about him? and take a moment to look at the father in the eyes and meditate on how merciful God the father has been towards you and in remembering his kindness then be transformed to be like your heavenly father whose disposition is tender to sinners who repent. Even those who repent 77 times. It's at this moment that you have the opportunity to forsake resentment for if you're bitter at someone else you have a log in your eye and you have forgotten what God is like and how God has been toward you.

So remember how when you repented remember how God saw you from far off and ran to you and threw his arms around you and kissed you and lavished defection upon you when you repented.

[28:57] See that afresh today and so humble yourself before God confess your resentment confess your bitterness and own the just may need more forgiveness than the person who you were spiteful against.

second, for anyone who's possibly stuck in an older brother attitude who maybe can be smug towards others for brothers and sisters remember brothers and sisters that's what we are who don't appear to be as far along as you in the faith who don't read their bible as much as you or maybe don't date their spouse or not as intentional with their spouse as you or maybe don't disciple their kids like you don't stop doing those things those are good things but consider your heart are you grateful for the obedience for the growth that God has worked in you or have you quietly started to take credit for it put another way do you see the growth your growth as evidence of God's grace towards you or do you see it as evidence that you're just doing better than everyone else truly what is your identity as a

Christian is your growth and obedience which is mercy in and of itself or is it God's mercy towards you past mercy present mercy and so you are merciful to others the older brother saw his brother's sin and how did he respond he became angry the father saw the son's sin and how did he respond he moved towards him with compassion so when you encounter weakness failure immaturity and sin in others and we will encounter that you'll encounter that in the person sitting next to you you'll encounter that in me but when you encounter that which one the older brother or the father will you reflect you can be kind and tender hearted not because holiness doesn't matter we still need to reprove and rebuke and exhort and look out for each other to see the sin in each other's lives so we can help each other but remember that's ultimately about moving towards each other to help each other so if you're living like an older brother impatient with judgmental towards maybe even self-righteous today's an opportunity to repent turn to the father again and call to mind the

tenderness that he's had towards you and reflect him remember

Jesus came to seek and save the lost and that includes you alright well this morning we've had the privilege of seeing something beautiful from the heart of God our father through one of the most vivid and poignant passages in all of scripture we've seen the tragedy of forgetting the goodness of the father we've seen the danger of believing that life far from him will satisfy us we've seen the ugliness of standing near him physically or our hearts are far from him but above all we've seen the father a father who rejoices when lost or found father who receives who receives repentant sinners and even a father who goes out and entreats the self-righteous son who refuses to come inside so let's return to where we began the A.W.

Tozer he said what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us so what comes into your mind when you think about God do you picture a father standing at a distance with his arms crossed waiting to see whether you've done enough or do you see the father Jesus has shown us in this parable a father who sees the sinner while he's still a long way off a father who runs who embraces who restores who celebrates that is what God is like and yes he is grieved by our rebellion he opposes our pride he calls us to repent but for the sinner who comes to him in humility and faith his heart is not reluctant he receives us so whether you've wandered far away like the younger son or whether you've been standing outside with your arms crossed like the older brother come to the father come humbly and honestly and come remembering that you don't stand before him because of your own obedience you stand before him as one who has received mercy so

[35:14] Christian let that reality transform the way you walk out of this room yes caring for our brothers and sisters who are stuck in sin but doing so a little humbler a little kinder a little quicker to forgive a little more merciful towards others not lowering the call to holiness but helping others as objects of mercy to grow in holiness because you've remembered what God is like what God's disposition has been towards you you were are and always will be an object of the father's mercy for God's glory and our joy let's pray may may!