

Our Extravagantly Gracious Father

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[0:00] You can be turning to Luke chapter 15. Luke chapter 15, I'll be reading there in just a moment.

Because of today's passage, I'm not blaming it, but because of today's passage, I have always thought that the word prodigal referred to someone who runs away, makes a mess of their life, and returns ashamed, hoping someone will take them in.

We've all watched a movie where someone sarcastically says, well, the prodigal has returned. And that's what people mean, many people today mean when they use that word.

I was surprised to find out they're not using it correctly. The word prodigal means wasteful or lavish. It might refer to someone who wastes their money or to someone who is very generous. Many call what we will look at today the parable of the prodigal son because of his downfall with his lavish, wasteful spending of his father's money.

[1:39] It's not inappropriate to call this the prodigal son, but it's not the focus of the parable.

The father's the focus of the parable. In fact, the whole point of this account is to show us a glimpse of how prodigal our heavenly father is when sinners repent.

So let's look at Luke 15, starting in verse 11. Let me read down to the end of the chapter.

The he here is Jesus. And he said there was a man who had two sons and the younger of them said to his father, father, give me the share of property that's coming to me.

And he divided his property between them. Not 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.

[2:47] 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 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 will say to him, father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

And he said, 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 he ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, father, I have sinned against heaven.

[3:54] And before you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe and put shoes on his feet and bring the fattened calf and kill it.

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 brother 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 has received him back safe and sound. But he was angry and refused to go in.

His father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, look, these many years I have served you and I have never disobeyed your commandment.

[4:57] Yet you never gave me a goat, a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed a fattened calf for him.

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, your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for this passage.

We spoke earlier of how we wouldn't know much of anything about you if you didn't reveal it in your word. And I praise you, Father, that you have spoken this parable through your son to show us a bit of your heart.

And I pray that you would be with us. Lord, as we come to it, even just reading it, it's a blessing. But, Father, as we look at it, we need your spirit's help.

[6:06] I need your spirit's help both to hear and to speak. And I pray that you would bless that we would see our father in the light that Jesus portrays him in.

And I pray that you would change us because of it. And you would help us to have the kind of attitude that Jesus is pointing to.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. When I began this chapter last week, we did the first ten verses.

And I told you to begin with that there was a situation. We'll talk about that situation in just a second.

But there was a situation. And to answer that situation, Jesus said, it says, a parable.

Now, we would look at this and say he said three parables. But he said what we would classify as three parables, all with the main same point. The first two were meant to point out how eager he is to look for sinners.

[7:12] And how greatly he rejoices. And he goes on here to express the father's heart. So, as we began in verse 1, the tax collectors and sinners have been drawing near to Jesus.

In verses 2 and 3, the scribes and Pharisees grumbled because Jesus received sinners and ate with them. And they had a real problem with that. And Jesus then tells these parables.

He calls it a parable, illustrating that it's right to celebrate finding things that are lost. In verses 4 through 10. And in both of those first, what we would call parables, he ends each parable talking about how God the Father celebrates in heaven when a lost sinner repents.

And so he goes on and tells what we, again, would classify as a third parable. The most well-known parable in the world.

The prodigal son. And he tells this parable to illustrate God's heart toward repentant sinners. He's told us that it's good to look for lost things.

[8:37] He's told us it's a priority. He's told us that he set out to do it the minute man began to be lost. And now, Jesus is going to pull back the curtain.

And he's going to reveal the Father's heart when it comes to lost sinners. And so, in verses 11 through 22, we're going to see three people.

We'll look, first of all, at the prodigal son. Now, I'm not going to reread all this. It's familiar to you, and I've read through it. But as we think about the prodigal son, we could sum up his actions by saying, how estranged from a family can a Jewish boy be?

And that's kind of where we're ending up here. We're going to see a young boy. We read through it too quickly. We don't see some of the things that are going on. But what he does, almost just to a T, answers the question, how estranged from a family, how badly can a young Jewish boy hurt his dad?

And so, Jesus tells us. The parable starts out saying, it's the younger boy. There apparently is only two. The younger boy says, I want my inheritance now.

[10:03] Now, he's not married, according, he doesn't talk about him being married. So many think that he's 18. You can kind of imagine a second-born 18-year-old with this kind of attitude.

I want my inheritance now. And wanting that inheritance is wishing, almost wishing his father was dead.

I just wished you were dead so I could have my money. I want what's coming to me. And so, he asked for it.

And this young man has no regard for what the neighbors think. It was very rare for a son to ask for his inheritance before his father was dead.

It was an insult. Everyone knew that this boy hated his father, was insulting his father by asking for his inheritance.

[11:07] It would bring great shame upon this family. Did you hear about that family over there? I heard their younger son demand.

He demanded his inheritance. His dad isn't even dead. His dad isn't even old. He can't stand him. And he wanted all that was coming to him.

And so, the shame that would have been brought there, a rebel living in that house, just wanting out. And it would not only have brought shame, but it would have brought financial hardship.

Now, there are two sons and a Jewish family. The inheritance was divided amongst the children.

The oldest got a double portion and the rest got a single portion. So, in this economy, the older son that we'll see in just a few minutes, he got a double portion.

He got two thirds and this boy got a third. So, a third of all the father owned was given to this son.

[12:07] Now, I'm sure it all wasn't in cash. In fact, we find that one of the words here kind of infers that he converted what he got to cash.

A third of the cows, a third of the sheep. Something had to happen to the land so that, you know, maybe more sheep so that it equaled out to a third of the land.

However, it just threw everything in a dither. What was all set and working as far as probably a family farm or herdsman was all thrown to pieces.

And what this man, I'm talking about the father, what this man had earned was what he was going to live on the rest of his life. Often the father would say, this is what the oldest son is going to get and this is what the rest of them are going to get and he would do that long before he died and so everyone knew what was going on.

The young man wasn't asking for this. But when a father did that, he said, oh, the oldest son gets this and the other children get this. What was already technically assigned to them was used by this man to live on for the rest of his life.

[13:19] However long he lived, he was living off from what he had earned even though he had already assigned it to his children. And as he got older and if he got to the point he couldn't take care of himself mentally or physically, the sons then would take what he had earned, even what was assigned to them, and they would take care of him in the old age.

His old age. And so this son was tremendously shaming this dad. And then as a Jewish boy he wants nothing to do with his family.

So he takes the cash value of everything that he's gotten, gathers it up, and leaves. And he doesn't go down the street, he doesn't go across the county, he goes to a far country.

Just insulting. I don't want to be anywhere near my dad. And he moves to this distant country and so he's not in Israel.

He's not in a place where things were observed unto the Lord as they should have been. We know this because it's a distant country, we know this because of the pigs that are talked about.

[14:39] And so he's shamed his father in that way. We can see this next point partly because of what is said here in the very use of the word prodigal in its proper form, but we also see it from what the eldest son does.

It's this boy and he goes, when he goes to this other country, he wastes what his father has worked hard for on a wild and carefree living.

Now, in the description, it doesn't say that he was with harlots. It could be that his older brother was assuming. It would have kind of hinted that way because of the way he spent his money, but we don't know.

But the fact of the matter is this young boy somewhere, went somewhere and it would have been easy for him to say, let's have a party, I'll pay. Hey, buddy, you want to go out and get something to eat?

I'll pay. I've always wanted a sports car like this. I'll pay. And he just throws this money around buying friends or buying excitement or buying fun, whatever the case may be, but he loses every bit of his father's money.

[15:55] He ends up being poor, in fact, destitute is a better word, because of his being prodigal, being wasteful wasteful with his money.

And so there in the far country, having shamed his dad on the way out, shamed his dad and the way he acted when he got there, lives in an unclean country, a country that does not serve God. A Jewish boy forsaking his heritage is in such dire straits now that he's feeding pigs as a hired servant.

But he can't eat what he feeds them. What news got back? What did people hear?

Yeah, I heard that that boy down the street got mad at his dad, took a third of his money, took off, wasted it all, he's not living as a Jew, and he's feeding pigs.

[17 : 09] What did that guy do wrong? What kind of a dad is he? And the boy was in desperation. In that far country, in this desperate situation with nothing to eat, in a humiliating situation, this boy remembers his father's gracious generosity, and he repents.

He says, my father is gracious to his hired servants, maybe thinking this guy who's hired me won't even feed me. And in that moment, he realizes, I don't deserve anything from my father.

And just by way of side note, I won't spend a lot of time on this, but this situation is a good example of what the Bible means by repentance.

Seeing what we've done wrong, seeing that because of our sin, we deserve punishment, and turning from that.

Now, the rest of his repentance takes place in front of his father, father, but in his heart, repentance has taken place. I'm in a bad situation, it's my own fault.

[18 : 31] I'm going to turn away from my situation, I'm going to forsake the sin I'm living now. He can't in one sense forsake his wasteful spending, but he has no more money.

But he's going to forsake the attitude that brought him here. He's going to go humble himself. He's going to go put himself under his father as a servant.

He couldn't wait to get out of there as a son. He couldn't wait for his dad's money as a son, and now he's turned from that, turned from his sin and rebellion to his dad.

And he leaves following sin, walks back to his country, chooses to trust and submit to his father.

Now we begin to see the framework for who's really being centered on here.

This boy is walking back, and we begin to see the father's reaction to the lost son. when the son, and I'm going to take just a few things that happened early in this account and mention those, because they also point to the father.

[19 : 54] When this all began, and this younger son says, give me my money, it would have been entirely appropriate for the father to say no.

It would have been entirely appropriate, even for this father, if the son was as rebellious as it sounded like, to have called the elders of the city together, and according to Deuteronomy 21, 18, and 19, this son was so rebellious, he could have had him stoned.

Why didn't he? Because he loves the returning of the rebellious. He loves the repenting of sinners.

And so he let him out of his money and he went. The boy went. Now the boy is back. One commentator I read said, it's a good thing the older brother didn't catch him first.

You got what you deserved. Didn't work out like you thought it would. get out of here. I don't want anything to do with you. And you shouldn't bother dad. You've humiliated him. You've made him suffer financially.

[21 : 12] Everybody's talking about him. You're the son that ruined our family. Be gone. This elder son didn't catch him. It was the father.

And the father could have seen him coming and said there he is. The father could have had time to brood. The father could have had time to think about what this son had done. Maybe he thought he was being kind to let him have his money.

But look what he's done to us. Look at his brother. Look how bitter he is. Look at all the circumstances. And he could have said I've had it. And the minute he sees his son he could have said hey guys elders of the city there's the guy.

You've heard what's going on. You guys have talked about it. Let's get together. Let's stone him. It could have been his reaction. But this father loves this son in spite of his actions.

And this father has been standing at the edge of his property remembering the direction his son went. And maybe every morning drinking his coffee he's standing there sipping thinking I hope he comes back.

[22 : 27] I want him back. He has this heart of love towards rebellious sinner that wants him back.

And one day he drops his Folgers. Because there he is. He's a long way off but I can tell by the way he walks that's my son.

I'm so glad he's coming back. And in his mind it may or may not have been that he's thinking he's turned. He's turned from his lifestyle.

He's making steps towards me. It looks like the beginnings of repentance. The father does what old men are not supposed to do.

he pulls his long legs up and bears those milky white calves that no one is supposed to see on an old man.

[23:34] And he runs. How indignant. How utterly ridiculous looking to see this old man run. But he loves his son and he wants his son and so he runs to him.

And before the son can say a word he hugs him and kisses him. I can picture the father holding his son in his brace and the son's just trying to get those words out and he says oh father I have sinned against heaven and before you.

I'm not worthy. But he doesn't get to finish his words. The son or the father holding his son hearing the beginning of these words seeing that his heart has changed removes the marks of the old condition and gifts him the marks of sonship.

The robe's gotta go what he had. He has to have the best robe. A son of mine will wear my clothes. A ring.

This boy needs a ring. A ring. That would probably be a signet ring. That means he could buy or sell or carry on business or lead workers or whatever the case may.

[24:55] A signet ring signified authority in the family. And now he's saying not only has he identified as my son, he can live as my son. He can work as my son. And then he's gotta have sandals because slaves went barefoot.

Sons wore sandals. And you could just see this is unusual. We would see somebody come back like that and say hmm, looks interesting.

I'll hire you for two weeks and we'll see how genuine it is. the word prodigal is now beginning to be shown in its true meaning.

Not with the son. He was prodigal. But with the father. Who's now showing just how lavish he can be in grace.

Lavish he can be in love. And he throws a lavish banquet for that sinful prodigal. Calf.

[26:03] Now you butchered meat according to how big a crowd you had because when it's done you don't put it in the refrigerator. When it's done it goes bad.

For two or three maybe a chicken. Or four or five maybe a lamb. A little lamb. Four or five or seven maybe a ram. Or for ten or fifteen.

But a calf. A fatted calf. It fed a whole village. And it was a calf that was probably kept in a pen. Fed the best stuff. We would call it sweet feed in our day. Grain that was sweetened so that they really put on weight. And make it the tastiest. And here is this son whose father is throwing this banquet.

And it's not just a we're having soup and sandwiches. This is a shindig. food. And this father sits down to eat with his was lost is found son.

[27:20] How many of us would be like that? I want you to remember a verse that we looked at last week. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying this man receives sinners and eats with them.

Jesus here is showing that God has welcomed to himself as genuine sons with full privilege those who had sinned and were far off from him had him now repented.

Can you imagine those tax collectors and sinners sitting here? Now this parable was told to the scribes and Pharisees but the tax collectors and sinners I'm sure heard it.

And can you imagine how it must have welled up within them to hear of this grace of this father towards a son that had caused him such shame how he lavished this love on them and the tax collectors who everybody hated were now sitting with Jesus and eating some of them having repented and they knew they didn't deserve to be there they'd been traitors they'd been crooks they'd been the vilest of Israel and then the sinners who would that be that might be some of the ones who were harlots some of those who had lived a profligate sinful life men or women now sitting with Jesus and hearing of the father's love towards sinners like this but there's another person in this account that elder brother what does a good son look like why he's a son who hasn't left his father he's a son who's done everything he was told he is a son who hasn't even taken a goat for himself he's not wasted his father's money he hasn't shamed the family that's what a good Jewish boy acts like he hears this noise when he comes home what's going on didn't you hear your brother's home that's not my brother why the noise your dad killed the fatted calf he's celebrating he so loves your brother he's so glad he's back and the older brother is angry for the father showing love and grace to that sinful prodigal remember the father had already sat down and ate with this

sinner this older brother didn't believe the younger brother deserved that grace he would have been screaming for

[31:03] Deuteronomy 21 stone that boy for what he's done to our family stone him he doesn't deserve it he didn't earn the right a robe a ring shoes let him feed the pigs somewhere else he doesn't have the right to be here he didn't earn the right to be back where was he when things were hard and so he refuses to go into the feast refuses to acknowledge the sinful prodigal as his brother when he talks to his dad he says that son of yours and he refuses to accept the prodigal's repentance I can picture in the back of his mind he thinking yeah he'll do anything he can now that he's hungry whatever he is maybe he's going to try to take another third my just so many reactions when people think that somebody doesn't deserve what they're getting and what would your reaction as a father be to a son who talked like this but this father continues to show grace and as

I speak these things I want you to remember who he's relating to in this parable he is now talking about the other elder brother and that is something he's addressing to the scribes and Pharisees this father's reaction shows extravagant grace he's sitting in the banquet with the son that was lost who has repented and returned and he's got a son that's sitting out there grumbling and complaining that this son didn't deserve it but what he does then is he's like that shepherd he's like that woman he gets up and he goes out and he finds his other lost son and entertains him son you're not at the banquet yeah yeah that son of yours he doesn't deserve to be here he refuses to enter his father's joy he refuses to acknowledge his brother's repentance and he refuses to see his own sinful pride the father at that point says it was good for us because your brother was dead and is alive it is good for us to feast he has repented and the father in grace invites that older brother to come in and the father could have said well if you're going to be like that go to the other barn and stay out of our way or he could have said you pretend to be all righteous and good but you show just as much bitterness just as much sin as your brother maybe you ought to leave for a while nope this is good and encourages him to come enter into the joy of his repentant brother everyone looks for lost things that are precious to them everyone rejoices when they find the lost things that were precious to them the prodigal's repentance was precious and so the father rejoiced and the older son should have so what did the older son do we don't know which is another statement of grace that the scribes and

Pharisees didn't like what the younger brother the tax collectors and sinners had done to their father's inheritance Israel they do not believe or accept the tax collectors and sinners repentance they feel that tax collectors and sinners are too sinful they should just be judged the scribes and Pharisees have done everything right in their mind Jesus should be rejoicing with them for what they've done and Jesus silence as to what the older brother does in the parable points to his grace judgment has not happened yet there's still time to repent they are sinners they need repentance they need to be willing to enter the joy of their father because the tax collectors and sinners are repenting!

some important things to see here the screaming picture in this parable is not about the young boy or about the older brother the screaming truth in this parable is the father who's pointing to the father God Jesus wants these people to see the unbelievable grace of God in his eagerness for sinners to repent God could have destroyed us the minute Adam bit that fruit God could have destroyed each one of us now I know physics don't work out with this but just bear with me he could have destroyed each one of us the minute we physically chose to sin of course we were born sinners we deserved you know the illustration doesn't pan out he could have done us in earlier but God has been prodigally generous and lavish people live to be a hundred years old some of them never come to Christ what a slap in the face to God and yet God allowed them to live all that time saying come come come and they don't instead he is gracious not desiring that any should perish but that all should come to repentance and so see the unbelievable grace secondly see the love for sinners in the joy he expresses at the sinners at the repentance of sinners we saw this last week as we looked at the first ten verses he says there's joy in heaven or the repentance over the repentance of one sinner and then he says there's joy in the presence of the angels that means [39:11] God is letting the angels see that he is joyful when one sinner repents we have a God who is lavish with grace lavish with mercy and that's all because Jesus took our sin upon himself and!

the penalty so that a son who but moments ago wanted to take all he could from God and run as far away from God as he could and waste every bit of what he got from God on himself and ended up

in the desperate miserable situation as a sinner feeding pigs but instead when he repents the work of Christ now brings the joy of the long robe of sonship the ring of restoration the shoes that announce freedom from slavery and that's because of what Jesus has done the father is lavishly merciful he's lavishly gracious because Jesus has taken that punishment for us and so I want you to see from if never before this moment on that we serve a

God who is extravagantly lavishly unfathomably! gracious and loving now he's also holy he doesn't give up there will be a time when his patience will run out and so we serve a prodigal God one who lavishes extravagant amounts of grace on sinners for which you and I can say praise the Lord let's pray thank you father for your word and I praise you for this picture of yourself I thank you that those who were tax collectors and sinners probably heard this and caught a glimpse of the wonder of what God was willing to do for them thank you father that

Nicodemus was one of those Pharisees who eventually came to himself thank you that the apostle Paul was one to whom though acting like an elder brother you brought to repentance thank you father in whichever category we are those who would be the prodigal take what God gives and run or those who think we're better than everyone else and don't see the value of repentance to God I pray that you would be with us help us first of all to praise you help us to be quick to repent pray that if there's one here who doesn't know you may they not see you!

as that one who stands ready with the club but that one who is willing to show his chalky white legs running to you desiring to see you saved finding you I pray that you would be with us in Jesus name amen we're going to sing hymn six as we close hymn six come my soul bless thou the Lord