

**The Tale of Two Sons, Part 5**

Scripture: Luke 15:28-32

Code: 42-205

I want you to open to Luke 15 again as we return to the family in our story of a father and two sons. I will tell you mercifully this will be the last in this series. The final segment in the study of the Lord's most famous story and perhaps arguably the most fascinating parable that He ever told, it is a parable about salvation. It is a parable that contains all the rich elements of salvation. Tucked into this incredibly straightforward and clear story is the issue of sin, freedom, disgrace, shame, desperation, repentance, faith, atonement, grace, forgiveness, reconciliation, sonship and blessing. It's all here as we have been learning. It is the story of a father who compassionately loves his two sons. Unfortunately, his sons do not love him. They are both rebels. Neither of them has any relationship with him in a personal sense, though they've been brought to life by him, obviously physically. They dishonor him and they do so publicly. It is really the story of a loving, compassionate, gracious, merciful, forgiving, reconciling father and how his two sons responded to him.

You can look at it the other way, it is also the story of two kinds of sinners. One who is openly and outwardly and manifestly wicked and immoral and irreligious and rebellious and the other who is inwardly immoral and rebellious, but outwardly conforms. He is moral on the surface, he is religious on the surface. But neither of these two have any relationship whatsoever to their father. And that manifests itself, as we have already seen, through the whole story. And the irony of the story is that the one who openly disobeyed, the one who flagrantly dishonored his father winds up being reconciled and the one who appeared to obey and honor his father ends up unreconciled.

It is very much like another story Jesus told in Matthew 21 verses 28 to 32. I just remind you of that story because it's somewhat similar. In that story Jesus said, "What do you think? A man had two sons, he came to the first and said, 'Son, go to work today in the vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will, sir,' and didn't go. Came to the second and said the same thing, he answered and said, 'I will not,' and yet afterward regretted it and went. Which of the two did the will of his father? They said the latter, the one who said he wouldn't but did, not the one who said he would but didn't. And Jesus then said, 'Truly I say to you that the tax gatherers and the harlots will get into the Kingdom of God before you." Pretty clear what the two sons were pointing to, isn't it? Jesus at the time was talking to the leaders of Israel. They were like the son who said he would go and didn't, and the tax gatherers and the sinners were like the son who said he wouldn't go and did. And in the end, they were the

ones who entered the Kingdom of God. That's very similar to the story in Luke 15 to which you can return.

Again, both sons are rebels. In the Middle East, there's an old Arabic phrase and it goes like this. A man had two sons and each one was worse than the other. And this is the story of a man who had two sons and each one was worse than the other. They are alike in many ways. Each has the same source of life, the father. Each resents his father and has no love for him. Each wants his share of his father's wealth and feels entitled to it. They take different approaches to get it, one asks for it and the other waits to get it, but each wants his share of the father's wealth. And each wants to do with it whatever he will with whomever he wishes. Each dishonors the father. Each insults the father. Each tries to live in separate worlds from the father, the younger son in a far country, the older son near the house, but has his own collection of friends. Each is loved by the father. And on behalf of each, the father makes a shameful public demonstration of that love. Each is given the opportunity to receive the father's forgiveness and reconciliation. Each is given the opportunity to repent, be forgiven, enter into the full richness of a genuine relationship and full access to all the father's wealth.

But they're different in some ways also. One was immoral, the other was moral. One was away, the other was near. One was publicly scorned and the other was publicly respected. The father reaches out in mercy and grace to both because they illustrate two kinds of sinners; the immoral and the moral, the irreligious and the religious, the blatant and the hypocrite.

Now as we have learned because it's unmistakably clear, the father is God in Christ. The father is the loving, life-giving Redeemer of sinners, the Savior, the reconciler who forgives those who repent and believe. The sons are sinners. And some are irreligious and blatant and some are religious and hidden. But they are both sinners who are void of a relationship with God. In each case what we learn is that God gives sinners the freedom to sin whatever way they want. That's the choice that sinners have. It's not whether they can choose to sin or not to sin, it's just that they can choose what category of sin they will engage in. There are some who choose to sin flagrantly and blatantly and immorally and irreligiously and without any regard for public courtesy or public evaluation. They don't care what people think. There are other sinners who choose to conform to certain ethical moral standards to gain their position in society by being perceived to be good people. But those are the only choices the sinner and all the mixing of the choices in the middle. The sinner can't choose whether to sin or not to sin, but he can be free to choose what kind of sinner he will be. Don't think that sinners have anymore freedom than that, they don't. But that is the realm in which they function freely.

And the amazing reality of the story is this, that God loves sinners religious or irreligious, moral or immoral, outward or inward. He loves them both. He offers them both grace, forgiveness,

reconciliation, sonship and eternal blessing whether they are extremely wicked or extremely moral, which these two sons illustrate. The one son doesn't care about anything but fulfilling his lusts to the max and is as bad as you can get. The other son to the very end parades his self-righteousness and that's why he thinks everything his father is doing is a violation of what is just and right and is shameful. So you have the extremely wicked and the extremely moral and the point is, God loves sinners at the extremity of those two different categories of sin and therefore every sinner in the middle. The younger son comes to the father when he is destitute. He repents for his sins. He trusts in his father's goodness and mercy and kindness and compassion and love and receives therefore his forgiveness freely by grace, is reconciled and enters into lavish blessing. That's the picture of the sinner who repents. He is the picture of the one who comes for salvation. He is the illustration of the very people Jesus is associating with as we remember back in verse 1, the tax gatherers and the sinners, the public outcasts. They were the ones coming to Him. Of course Jesus is condemned then in verse 2 by the Pharisees and scribes for receiving them and eating with them.

He goes on to say, "You don't understand, this is the heart of God. God is by nature a Savior." Verse 7, the end of the story about a shepherd finding his sheep, He says, "There's joy in heaven over one sinner who repents." Verse 10 at the end of a story about a woman who finds a lost coin, again there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. The dominating great truth of this story is that God finds His joy when sinners repent whatever kind of sinners they are categorically. And all heaven celebrates with Him. The feast is in the honor of God. The feast is in the honor of the gracious, loving father who reconciled the unworthy, undeserving, sinning son based on nothing but his trust and repentance, no works. He came back, he didn't have to make restitution. He didn't have to do anything. And he was given the full rights and privileges of sonship. It's a story about the mercy of God, the compassion of God, the love and forgiveness of God who finds His joy when one sinner repents. God delights in saving sinners.

Now at the point when the feast is in full motion, the older son steps onto the scene and that's where we are in the story. We find him in verse 25. And we're going to conclude by looking at him and seeing how the story ends. The story, as I've been telling you, is full of shame. It started with a shameful request, and a shameful response, and a shameful rebellion, and a shameful repentance, and a shameful reception, and then in the eyes, of course, of the Pharisees who are listening to this story, the father gives a shameful reconciliation and a shameful celebration.

We come to verse 25 and there are three more shameful things here...a shameful reaction, a shameful response, and a shameful resolution. These involve the older son. The shameful reaction, verse 25, "His older son was in the field. When he came and approached the house he heard music and dancing. Summoned one of the servants, began inquiring what these things might be. 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.'"

And we meet the older brother. He comes wandering in. He hasn't been a part of anything, none of the planning which indicates that he had no relationship to the father. This would be impossible for the people listening to the story to believe that a father would put on a celebration like this without consulting his older son who had already been given the estate and should have weighed in on all the events. But he has no relationship with him. The father knows that he will not enter into this event. He will not want this event. He has no interest in the well-being of his brother nor in the joy of his father. He shows up on the outside, the party is in full sway. He asks one of the boys, the Greek word there, one of the young boys, the perimeter kids that are kind of hanging around the outside of the celebration while the adults are on the inside, "What is going on?" and he tells him his brother has come back and his father has killed the fattened calf, which of course was kept for the very most important occasion the family ever had. And this was it because he was back and he was back whole. He was back having made Shalom with his father, peace.

Now the reaction of the older brother is so important, "He became angry." And right there the Pharisees meet themselves. They consistently were angry about Jesus associating with sinners, embracing sinners, forgiving sinners, reconciling wicked outcasts that they wouldn't go near or touch or speak to. Here they meet themselves. This is the very attitude that they showed back in chapter 5 when they asked the disciples why in the world Jesus ate meals with such outcasts, such wicked sinful people. This is the same attitude they had in chapter 19 when they grumbled again because Jesus went to be the guest of a man who was a sinner, namely Zacchaeus the tax collector. They were continually outraged by the conduct of Jesus associating with sinners, which indicated they had no idea of the heart of God, no understanding of God as a Savior, and no understanding of how heaven rejoiced in the salvation of sinners. They became angry and that is how the older son reacts in verse 28, "He became angry." They don't believe in grace. They don't believe in forgiveness. They believe in righteousness and justice and restitution. And you earn your way back. There's no such thing in their system as free forgiveness as the removal of punishment apart from any works. It has to be earned. You earn your place with God. You keep the law. You toe the line. You walk the mark.

By the way, this is the damning lie that holds the religious world captive and sends them all plummeting into hell. And if the banquet symbolizes...the Messianic banquet...if the banquet symbolizes the feast of the redeemed, if the banquet symbolizes the Kingdom of God, if the banquet symbolizes everlasting life, of course he didn't go in. And that's what it says. "He was not willing to go in."

Boy, I'm reminded of Matthew 23, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut off the Kingdom of Heaven from men and you do not enter in yourselves or do you allow those who

are entering to go in." You don't have any way into that Kingdom because your understanding of salvation is so warped. That was perhaps the most significant indictment in the Matthew 23 diatribe against them, that they did not enter the Kingdom and nor were they leading anyone else into it. Later in that same chapter He said, "Outwardly you appear righteous to men, inwardly you're full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." Hypocrites are all sinners on the inside because hypocrisy has no way to constrain the flesh internally.

Of course he wouldn't go in. He hated the idea of grace. He resented this mercy and this instant reconciliation. And he says all of this, as we will see. But before we listen to his speech, let me help you define this kind of sinner. Augustine said, "Free will without grace has the power to do nothing but sin. Free will without grace has the power to do nothing but sin." And long ago he was right and that is still true. As I said, the sinner can choose his category but he can't choose anything other than sin.

Now let me just follow that a little bit. And this, just to give you a little historical footnote, this is the kind of thinking that set Martin Luther going in the right direction. Just over the last few days I read a treatment of his various theological emphases and it pointed again to this very important element. He came up with this glorious truth that all of us know to be the substantial heart of the gospel, salvation by grace alone through faith alone, the great doctrine of substitution imputed righteousness and all of that which had been lost in the Dark Ages. But what led to that was an understanding of the inability of works to do anything. Let me help you to understand this. Works may appear good. They may appear good. And they may be on a human level good, that is they help people, they're kind, they relieve people's suffering, they're charitable, they're philanthropic, whatever. But they are really sinful when they are done by the unregenerate because they lack purity and they lack true motive which is the glory of God. And anything that is not done to the glory of God is done then to the glory of man and that is the sin of all sins. They are really expressions of human pride. We're glad for them because they're better than other kinds of expressions of human pride. We appreciate what we call the milk of human kindness. But it is really a form of sinful expression done for the well-being of the sinner. And as such, good works, especially when they proliferate in the life of an unregenerate person, tend to layer the deception so that the person instead of seeing himself as wretched, begins to convince himself by his goodness that he is far better than he really is. So anybody who thinks that by their good works they are somehow doing what is meritorious and earning favor with God is just making the deception further and further buried in their hearts and layer and layer and layer of good work makes it harder to get to reality. The works of sinners may not all be crimes, but they are not without sinfulness because they are done for personal and selfish motive and gain. They bring honor to man. They produce self-satisfaction. They produce self-gratification. They produce pride and a sense of well-being and that deceives the sinner and that increases sin because it is proud and pride is at the head of all sins and so we really in doing good apart from God, apart from grace are adding

to our pride which is to compound our sinfulness at its most devastating point.

And then when you add...that's not enough...you add the next element, and that is this, that if you think by doing those good deeds you are obtaining salvation, now you have added another sin to your pride. You have added the sin of a misunderstanding of the revelation of God and the gospel. You have added the damnable lie of a works/righteousness system to your pride. It's bad enough...let's look at the three again...to do works that you think are good but they're not because they're for yourself, and then add to that that you proliferate those works which builds up your sense of pride and well-being and feeling of self-satisfaction which increases your pride which makes the sin all the worse, but add to that the illusion that somehow you're gaining favor with God and you have added the ultimately damning sin that somehow you can earn your salvation. And the further you go down that road, and the more you do that, the more blind you become and that is why Jesus said to the Pharisees, "They are...what?...blind leaders of the blind. On the outside they are painted white, on the inside they're filthy." This is what happens to extremely religious people. So you see extremely profligate evil people in the story and extremely religious people in the story and the point is not that everybody is either one of those extremes, the point is that God opens His compassionate, forgiving, reconciling love to those who are at those extremes and everybody in between. And you see that because at this point the Lord in telling the story has the father, who is God in Him, in Christ, mercifully humble Himself.

It's amazing. It says in verse 28, "And his father came out and began entreating him." Here we see God the initiator again. Here we see God in Christ the seeker, just as in the case of the younger son, the father came down out of his house and ran right down to the middle of town for all to see, bearing the scorn and the shame of the embarrassment of violating public common conventional behavior. And he did it to embrace the sinner and protect him from the shame. Here the father leaves the festival, goes out and does what you would never expect God to do, beg a sinner, beg a hypocrite. But He is the one who seeks to save the lost.

When the information, obviously, about the older son reaches the father, the word comes to him that his son is on the outside and he's not going to come in. He now knows he has his second rebel son and we're now going to find out how God feels about religious hypocrites. What they would have expected...what they would have expected was that the father would be absolutely insulted by this. It is a blatant insult. It is an utter disregard for the father's honor, the father's joy, the brother's well-being. He shows himself as having no love for either of them. And the traditional Middle Eastern response would be to take the son and give him a public beating for such dishonor. But nothing goes the way you'd think it's going to go in this story. It's just one breach of perceived honor after another after another, after another, after another. But instead of the father ordering him to be beaten and locked in a room somewhere until he can be dealt with, the insulted dishonored father comes out.

And he starts begging him. Here he shows up again in condescension. Here he shows up again in mercy. Here he shows up again in compassion and love and humility and kindness, leaves the party, comes out, goes into the night with everybody watching and the buzz sure is going to go through and they know what's going on. Another act of selfless love kindly toward this son in the same way that he ran to embrace the younger son. He goes out in mercy and he reaches to the hypocrite the same way he reached to the rebel.

I want you to notice the word "entreating" there. It says that he began entreating him, *parakaleo*, that's a very, very common word, it's actually a word that comes in a noun form. The *paraclete* meaning the Holy Spirit, the one who comes alongside, entreating is to come alongside to speak to, to come right alongside someone. That is he comes right out and goes alongside his son. And he pleads with him, and he calls him to come to the kingdom, to come to his house, to come to the celebration. And this son with whom the Pharisees and scribes are so clearly identified should have brought them face-to-face with themselves and their complete ignorance of the father whom they said they served. Oh, they were in the house, they were around, they were the religious ones, they were the dutiful ones, they were the moral ones. But they didn't know God, they didn't know the heart of God. They had no understanding of the joy of God. They had no interest in the recovery of lost sinners. They refused to honor God for saving grace which has always been the way God saved. They see Jesus, in fact, as satanic. And as Jesus said in John 5:23, "If they honored the Father, they would honor Me." They refused to go in.

But here is this wonderful compassionate grace of God reaching out to these angry hypocrites. And the response of the older son, verse 29, "He answered and said to his father, 'Look...'" let me stop there.

Everybody would take a breath there. Ahhhh! I mean, even the prodigal came back and said, "Father, father," just as he had said father at the beginning when he asked him for his estate. You don't address your father, "Look..." There's no title. There's no respect. And then he says, "For so many years I have been serving you," *douleuo*, slave language, *doulos*.

"For so many years I have been your slave." Now there's a legalist mentality. That's a no-fun posture, no joy. And what it indicates is that in the heart of this guy he has seen this as a horrible, grit-your-teeth, grind your way through these years and years of slugging out your slavery to this guy so that when he finally dies you can get what you're after. He was no different than the younger son. He wanted what he wanted, he just had a different way to get it. He didn't have the courage of his younger brother. He didn't have, you might say, the *shootsbah*(??), moxie. Now he decided the safe ground was to hang around and wait till the father dies and then get it. It's all nothing but slavery to him...bitter, resentful, angry for so many years. And he piles on the descriptives.

And then if you want to know the self-image of a hypocrite, here it is. "And I have never neglected a command of yours." Wow! Now if that isn't the language of a self-righteous hypocrite, I don't know what is. Who does that sound like? It sounds like the rich young ruler, doesn't it? It sounds exactly like the rich young ruler. Matthew 19, Luke 18 where Jesus says, "Here are the commandments," and he responds by saying, "I've kept all those. I've kept all those." Here is the proud hypocrite. Here is the guy who because he has done good is under the illusion that he is good, because he has done good for self-satisfaction and pride he has buried the truth of who he is deep, because he has done good for satisfaction and pride as a way to earn salvation, he has pushed it so far down that he can't even touch it any longer, it's completely buried in his subconscious. And he lives with this illusion that he has never ever neglected a command that his father had given him. There is the amazing self-deception of a hypocrite. He's perfect. I'm perfect, which is to say to the father, "And look, buddy, you're not. I am perfect. I understand what perfection is. I understand what perfect righteousness is and perfect justice and I know what perfect honor is and I know how you're supposed to behave and you're in violation of it. Again and again you're in violation of it. You took him back, you ran, you shamed yourself. You protected him from shame. You forgave him. You embraced him. You kissed him. You gave him full sonship. You gave him honor. You gave him authority. You gave him responsibility. You hold this massive celebration for an absolutely unworthy sinner. I'm perfect and you're not."

By the way, this is why Paul went around killing Christians because he hated grace. It was Paul, you remember, in Philippians 3 who says, "Blameless according to the law, that's how I live my life, under the illusion that I was absolutely blameless and these Christians with their message of grace were violators of God's holy law." And he went everywhere he could breathing threatening and slaughter and imprisoning and killing them.

He has no love for the father. He has no interest in the father's love for his younger brother. He has no desire to share in his father's joy. He has no joy period in anything. But he's still perfect and needs no repentance. How about that? What a classic illustration of a hypocrite. Angry, bitter, slave mentality, I've done all this to get what I expect to get, but he sees himself as perfect and needing no repentance. You want to know something? Nobody goes into the Kingdom of God without repentance. This is classic hypocrisy. His heart is wretched. His heart is wicked. His heart is alienated. His heart is selfish and he's blind to spiritual reality. And again, here are the Pharisees and the scribes, here's the religious sinner in the home of God, in the house of God, if you will, making a public display of affection for God, wearing clerical garb, or attending a certain kind of ritual, certain religious activities, moral on the public front, outwardly good, outwardly obeying the law, keeping all the rules. But no relationship to God. No concern for the honor of God. No joy. No understanding of grace.



The son isn't finished. He's going to dig his claws deeper into his father whom he sees as a sinner. He sees his father as a violator of righteous standards of which he is the source and says to him this. "I have never neglected a command of yours and yet you have never given me a kid, or a goat, that I might be merry with my friends. I've been the worker and I don't even get a goat. He's done nothing for you and he gets the fattened calf. This is not fair. This is not equitable. This is not just. This is not righteous."

You know what the son is really saying? "Father, I don't need to ask you for forgiveness, I haven't done anything. But I'll tell you something, you need to ask me for forgiveness for what you've done." That is the outrage of hypocrisy. That is the outrage of legalism. It demands that God forgive us for a violation of our understanding. He thinks the father needs to ask him for forgiveness.

And the Pharisees are going to identify with him. Yeah, this is right, this is the right posture. This is outrageous conduct by the father. The father is the culprit. The father is the bad guy here,. The son is a bad guy, son number one, sure he's a bad guy, the younger son, but the father's really the bad one, he's the one who has completely violated all conventional standards of respect and honor.

The son gives himself away a little bit here, he says...because he says, "You've never given me a kid that I might be merry with my friends." MY friends. He's accusing the father of favoritism and he's accusing the father of an unjust favoritism. But he's also pointing out the fact that when he has a party, it's not going to include his brother, it's not going to include his father. He lives in a completely different world. He has a completely different group of friends. He's at home but he has no relationship to the family. All his friends are outside the family. He parties with those who thinks the way he thinks. He parties with those who have no connection to the father. He doesn't understand the father's love, compassion, kindness, mercy, forgiveness and joy. He has no fellowship with the father. He is angry, resentful, jealous, envious, impenitent, and greedy. He thinks he's worked as a slave so long and what has he gotten? Nothing. And when he does get what he wants, it's not going to be a celebration with the family because he has no relationship to them. His father is nothing more than a slave master. He's going to have his party with his buddies. So classic in his description of the Pharisees who associated only with themselves, as we have seen in other texts.

This is the time when the older brother wishes the father were dead, probably wished it a lot if this were a real person. But in the story it comes out. "I haven't had my party. I haven't had anybody kill a kid for me so that I could have a party with my friends." He doesn't care about his father and now his father is wasting assets on this other son, a wicked son who by his own admission is unworthy. If his father was just dead, all of this would be over. If his father was just dead, then he would possess everything and he could start the party with his own buddies. Get the father out of the picture and

everything is good, everything is as it should be, everything is honorable again. Let's get back to an honorable world here. We've got to get rid of all this shameful stuff.

Verse 30 carries on a further assault on his father's character, integrity and virtue. "But when this son of yours," he won't even say my brother, so much disdain in him, "When this son of yours came who has devoured your wealth with harlots, you killed the fattened calf for him. You don't give me a goat, but you kill the fattened calf for him, this son of yours." Wow, you can cut that contempt with a knife.

How did he know...how did he know that he had used all that money with harlots? Because Jesus said he knew in the story. Just a little insight that tells us more about the behavior of the first son in the story and there, of course, characters that Jesus has fabricated. And so this is part of the story. This is to emphasize again that this man has lived as low as low gets. Add that to all the rest of the horror of his behavior. Some people have suggested that he made this up just out of scorn. But there's nothing in the text that says that. We assume that if Jesus puts it in his mouth, it was a reflection of what Jesus wanted us to know about the behavior of the younger son.

So here is something juxtaposed against a celebration that's pretty stark. You've got a celebration going on with music and dancing and the younger son and the feast and it's just a high time of joy. And out in the dark of the night you've got this horrific assault going on and the older brother is attacking the virtue, the integrity, the character of his father. All that he had kept in for all those years explodes out of him, all that fake respect and honor is gone. The facade is off. The cover is blown. And while they're all inside honoring that father, he's on the outside heaping contempt on him. This is the Pharisees. They saw themselves as righteous. They saw themselves as just. They therefore sat in judgment on God in Christ and they condemned Jesus for His mercy, compassion, love, and the gospel of grace. And the Pharisees would see this older brother, yeah, and this is righteous indignation, this is for finally in the story we have somebody who holds up honor.

You know, in his mind a Pharisee would think that son should be dead. If you spend your money on harlots, you get killed. Deuteronomy 21:18 to 21, you get stoned to death. He should be dead. Instead of dead, look at the party. This is incongruous. This is outrageous. This is shameful, everything about it. It's a shameful reaction by the son who is looking at the whole thing as shameful.

By the way, a little note here. You killed the fattened calf for him...not really...not really. The fattened calf wasn't really killed for the son, he was killed for the father. The father is the one who gives the credit...gets the credit, I should say, he's the reconciler. He determines who is going to be reconciled and under what terms. He's the one who ran and embraced and kissed. It really was a celebration of the father. But his anger has completely blinded him. And he has no knowledge of his father. The father is the main figure at the feast. The father is the one they're all honoring for such loving

forgiveness. And the people will accept the younger son because it's against convention to accept him. It would be against the norm to accept him back under those conditions. But they will because the father has. And so it's really the father who is being celebrated, just as in the end, in heaven, the joy of heaven, the eternal joy of the angels and all the redeemed that gather around the throne of God and even the joy of God is the joy that comes to God Himself for being the reconciler. When we go to heaven, the direction of our praise isn't going to be toward the sinners, it's going to be toward the Savior.

So here is this great feast and all the celebration honoring the father. And here at the same time is this son who heaps dishonor on the father simultaneously. It's the picture, the party symbolizes all the sinners who have collected around God to honor Him for their salvation. And outside are the Pharisees who are heaping scorn upon the Father God in Christ.

Then there's a shameful response. From another angle, verse 31, "He said to him, 'My child, you've always been with me, all that's mine is yours.'" What a tender response. That would be...that would be shameful in the eyes of the villagers. They would say, "Wait, you should finally somebody slap this guy. I mean, enough is enough, this mercy is getting a little over the top here. Please." But he says, "My child," *teknon*, eight times in this section *huios*, the more formal word for son. *Tekna*, my boy, my child, it's speaking in grieving, painful, agonizing, compassionate love and mercy. He speaks to him in endearing terms and that's the heart of God toward a wretched hypocrite. Wow, is there any question about God being a loving, compassionate Savior? The son uses no title, no respect. The son attacks the virtue, the integrity, the justice and the righteousness of the father. The son is saying in effect, "You need to be forgiven by me for the outrageous and unjust and dishonorable conduct that you have perpetrated." And here you see the patience of God with the sinners, even hypocrites. Sometimes, you know, it's easier to be patient with prodigals than it is with hypocrites. I will confess that. We all love a great story about a wicked, outrageous sinner who is converted, but we aren't nearly as excited about a hypocrite that's converted. And, of course, that's even more rare. People who are in false religion don't come as often. In fact, this is a footnote, it never say sin all four gospels that a Pharisee believed on Jesus and was saved. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and it implies that he came. Later on, Paul the Pharisee, was saved on the Damascus road, those are the only two. But he says to him, "Look, my child," endearing terms. "You've been around."

The father knows he's estranged. You've been around here superficially. Everything has always been available, it's all here. I always think of that when I think of people who misinterpret the Scripture. You know, cults, false religions, it's here. It's all here. You've always had it. If you ever wanted a relationship with Me, I was here and everything I have was here. And look what he says, "All that is mine is yours. I don't ever have to split it up." And here's the picture of the magnanimity of God and the endlessness of His grace and His resources, it's all for all who come to Him. It will never

be yours with your attitude. It will never be yours by works. You'll never earn it. But it's here if you ever want to establish a relationship with Me.

And verse 32 goes back to the main theme. "We had to be merry and rejoice. We had to." It's not like we had an option. "For this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live and was lost and has been found." We had no choice...why? This is what causes joy to God. This is heaven's joy. It can't be restrained. It can't be delayed. It can't be postponed. It can't be subdued. It can't be mitigated. It can't be lessened. Divine joy is released when one sinner repents and is reconciled. And heaven's joy will be released not just for a prodigal, not just for someone who's immoral and irreligious and blatantly sinful, but for secret sinners, rebels, the religious, the moral, the hypocrites, the ones whose lawlessness is all on the inside. God is saying here, Christ is saying, "I go out into the street for the prodigal and I go out into the courtyard for you. I humble Myself and take on public shame for the prodigal. And I humble Myself and take on public shame for you. I come with compassion and love and forgiveness and I am ready to embrace you and to kiss you and to give you full sonship with all its privileges, not just if you're the prodigal, but even if you're the hypocrite." He's really inviting him to salvation. You can come to the party if you choose, if you recognize your true spiritual condition, if you come home you can take possession of everything that's always been there.

The younger son was overwhelmed with his father's grace. Immediately confessed his sin, confessed his unworthiness in the very most magnanimous ways and he received instantaneous forgiveness, reconciliation, sonship all the rights and privileges that the father had at his disposal to give. He entered into the celebration of the father's joy, that is eternal salvation. And as I've been saying, that joy goes on in heaven forever.

The older son, the same tenderness, the same kindness, the same mercy, offered the same grace, reacts with bitter resentment, attacks the virtue, the integrity of the father. And his father makes one final appeal. "My child, it's all here. We had to celebrate, implied, and we will celebrate for you too if you come."

And it stops in verse 32, isn't that strange? What do you have hanging in your mind right now? Do you have a question there? I do. This is not an ending. What happened? Right? What did he do. You don't end a story without an ending, it's...and I guess this is another one of a series of shocks. After all of this you're waiting, you're waiting, you're waiting and it stops. And, you know, if you had been listening to the whole thing you'd say, "Come on." It's like a joke with no punch line that lasts a long time. We're all saying the same thing, what did he do? What did the older son do? The guests are all there. They're waiting. They know what's going on outside because the word is going in. What did he do? The guests are waiting, they want to know if he comes in. Having embraced and kissed his older son who repented, they want to know if he humbled himself, if he fell down before his

father and sought grace for his long hypocrisy and bitter service. They want to know if he was forgiven and reconciled and they would love to see the father come in with his arm around his son, bringing him to the head table and sitting him next to his brother. Wouldn't that be great?

Now that's...you know, there are a lot of stories like this, you just sort of write your own ending. By the way, just from a technical standpoint. The story is divided into two halves. The first half has eight stanzas and they feature the younger brother. The second half has eight stanzas and they...has seven stanzas, I should say, and they feature the older brother. It should be eight and eight, but it's eight and seven. And in the symmetry of the story there's a lot of technical things that show you the symmetry of the story that I haven't pointed out, but you have eight and then all of a sudden strangely you have seven. And so even in hearing the story, reading the story you would say it should be eight and eight, because that would be the symmetry that would be designed into that kind of Middle Eastern prose. The end isn't there. There's one section missing.

Now I would love to write one. I think maybe this would be good, "And the older son fell on his knees before his father saying, 'I repent for my loveless cold service, my pride and selfishness. Forgive me, father, make me a true son, take me to the feast.' At which point the father embraced and kissed him, took him in and seated him at his table by his brother and all rejoiced in the sons who had been reconciled to their loving father."

I like that. Or maybe another shorter one. "The son seeing his father's love, compassion and grace came to his senses about his wicked heart, was humbled, repented and reconciled."

But you know what? I don't get to write the end. Who wrote the end? The Pharisees wrote the end. Here's the end they wrote. "And the older son being outraged at his father, picked up a piece of wood and beat him to death in front of everyone." That's the ending they wrote. That's the cross and that's what they did just a few months after this. And, by the way, congratulated themselves on their righteous act that preserved the honor of Israel and Judaism and true religion and God. Let's pray.

What an ironic thing it is, God, that the father should have beaten the son, is beaten by the son to death in the greatest act of evil the world has ever seen. And yet, and yet, O God, out of that horrible ending of killing Your Son with wood came our redemption. The final shameful resolution of the story is the cross but out of that You have wrought our redemption for on that cross He died to bear our sins and what the leaders of Israel meant for evil, You meant for good. We thank You for this glorious salvation.

While your heads are bowed for just a moment. I don't know where you see yourself in this story, we're all there, either you're the open sinner or the hidden one, or some degree of that, or you're

restored to the Father and you really do identify with the Father's heart. You're one of those folks at the party. You have gathered around Him as one of the redeemed to celebrate. I hope that's true. But if you're still estranged from God living in sin, or estranged from God living in secret lawlessness, corrupt on the inside, come to the Father who has borne shame for you, who has come down and run the gauntlet to embrace you and protect you from the shame you deserve, who has come out into the night, who's left his throne to plead with a hypocrite, this is our gracious and good God who delights in mercy and finds His joy in forgiveness.

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