

The Older Son

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[0:00] Luke 15, verse 1. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him,! But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered,! This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

And then verse 11. Jesus continued, There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, Father, give me my share of the estate. So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth and wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

So he went, hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father's hired men have food to spare? And here I am starving to death. I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

[1:15] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men. So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to the father, or said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

But the father said to his servants, Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again, and he was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate. Meanwhile, the older son was in the field.

When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. Your brother has come, he replied, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.

[2:20] The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, Look, all these years I've been slaving for you and have never disobeyed your orders.

Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours, who has squandered your property with prostitutes, comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him.

My son, the father said, You are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. Luke 15 is one of those chapters in the New Testament where the Lord Jesus posts a neon sign that says, Danger!

Beware! Religion can be hazardous to your spiritual health. And the warning surprises us, doesn't it?

[3:32] Because we always thought that it's only worldly temptations that are hazardous to our spiritual health. That it's dangerous to go to nightclubs and dirty movies and wild parties.

Surely that's where the danger and the hazards lie. And we've not thought, perhaps lately, that going to church and praying and reading your Bible have dangers of their own for our spiritual health.

Our spiritual health. And so the Lord Jesus is calling us to think again and to be aware of the dangers of religion. I firmly believe that religion has damned as many people as it has helped.

That it has harmed as many as it has helped and saved. Because religion can lead a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, to thinking that they are good enough in themselves and therefore do not need the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

That is the danger of religion. And Jesus puts it right up in front of our face here in Luke chapter 15. And He uses a parable to do it.

[4 : 49] In fact, three parables. The parable of the lost sheep. The parable of the lost coin. And thirdly, the parable of the prodigal son. And we're focusing on that parable.

Last week, we looked at the younger son and saw how that he hated his father and wanted to be free from him and demanded his share of the inheritance and goes off with it and wastes it in wild living.

And then he comes to his senses and thinks completely different thoughts than what he had thought theretofore as to his father and his goodness and his abundance, even for the hired help at home.

And here I am starving. And he thinks different thoughts about himself and his sin. Oh, the sin of the way I treated my father and the way I've sinned against heaven. I'll go back and I'll confess my sin to my father and my unworthiness to be a son and perhaps he'll make me a hired hand.

Well, you remember the reception that the son received. It was altogether other than what he was expecting and what the crowd would have expected.

[5 : 59] The father doesn't disown him, but he welcomes him as a son. Everything that he gives him is a way of saying, son, I receive you not as a hired hand, but as a son with the full status of a son.

And then the celebration and the fattened calf that's killed and the party that goes on demonstrates as well the father's absolute joy in receiving back his erring son.

And we saw last week that the father stands for the Lord Jesus himself and that the younger son, the prodigal, stands for all of us who have gone astray, but especially in this historical setting, it stands for the tax collectors and the sinners, the irreligious who had forsaken God's way and gone their own way.

And the story teaches us Jesus' joy in finding and saving wicked sinners.

And the repeated message of all three parables is that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents. And Jesus says it over and over as if he knew what was happening in heaven.

[7 : 23] Well, now the parable is far from over. We've only met one of the father's sons. There's another. And the parable is just as much about the older son as it is about the younger son.

The older brother is no minor figure that's just added for color. No, he's very much an important factor because he represents the Pharisees and the teachers of the law and those religious people in the crowd.

Remember, there's two kinds of sinners in the audience that day that are highlighted for us in verses 1 and 2. And they both find themselves in Jesus' story.

There was the non-religious sinners, the tax collectors and the prostitutes, those sinners. They find themselves in the younger son who went off to a far country and wasted their living in wild living.

And the religious sinners of the day, the Pharisees and teachers of the law, they find themselves in the older son. And so we left off last week with the celebration just beginning.

[8 : 40] The father's joy over his returned son was contagious. The whole estate was buzzing with joyous activity.

Servants happily rushing about to put food and drink on the table. Musicians playing. Friends and neighbors rejoicing and dancing.

Hearts beating in sympathy with his father. There's a celebratory mood that settles over the whole estate and none is more happy than the father himself.

But there is one heart that shares nothing of the joy of this father. And as the older son comes in from a day's work in the field, we're told he hears the sounds of the party, the music, the dancing, and he asks some servant that's rushing around, hey, what's happening here?

And he says, oh, your brother's come and your father has killed the fattened calf. And this older son winces as he hears it.

[9 : 55] He's not made happy by it, but he's made miserable and sad and mad, I should say, by such news. He stubbornly refuses to go in and to have anything to do with the celebration.

Can you imagine what a public insult and humiliation that would have been to the father? He's got two sons and the party's going on and he's got a son that refuses, that boycotts the celebration. And so this older brother is a mirror in which the Pharisees and the scribes and all like them in the crowd could see their ugly reflection. because they too were angered and mad that the Lord Jesus ate with sinners, that he welcomed the non-religious people to enter the kingdom of God, to repent and believe and come and enjoy the Father's plenty.

It upset them and they muttered about it. So while all of heaven is rejoicing to see a sinner repenting and coming in, the Pharisees are complaining.

Heaven rejoicing, Pharisees complaining. What's the wickedness of such a heart? So out of tune with the Father's joys.

[11 : 23] What's wrong with these people? What's wrong with these religious folk in the crowd that are complaining about Jesus' mercy to sinners?

Well, the answer is seen in the older brother and what he says to his father when his father comes out and seeks to persuade him to come in and join the party. Well, notice three things.

First of all, their joyless religion. Notice in verse 29, he says to his father, look, all these years I've been slaving for you. Now, every day this son went to work in his father's fields just like any dutiful son would do.

But don't be fooled. He's not serving his father with gladness. He's not feeling honored just to be a son of this man.

He's not thankful for all that his father has done to build up the farm and to have such an estate that he one day would inherit. No, he's not enjoying his father's presence and fellowship in the work at all.

[12 : 32] Rather, he's just slaving away. He's putting in his time. He's waiting for the day when his father will die and it will all be his. Life in the father's house has been a joyless grind to this older son.

A form of slavery. Granted, he didn't run off into the far country like the younger brother did to get away from his hated father.

But there is no more love in his heart for the father than what the prodigal son had. So this is the Pharisee. This is the scribe.

And all like them, the religious people who were self-righteous, religious people. And their religion is all about doing, doing, doing.

Not only the commands of God, but all the other rules that they had added to God's commands.

And it all piled up upon them and caused them to have no joy in their religion.

[13 : 38] They did not freely serve God out of gratitude and joy for grace received, but rather out of fear to appease God and to gain heaven.

This is one whose religion is all dull and joyless. Though he is very careful to keep up his religious activities, if this man told you the truth, he would tell you that he finds God quite boring, frankly.

And so, of course, he prays. That's what good Christians do, don't they? But there's no enjoyment of communion with God in his prayers. There's no enjoyment that I am talking to the Lord Jesus, the King of Heaven, and he's listening to me.

There's no amazement that he hears and answers his prayer. No fellowship, no overflowing thanksgiving for all that he is and has done for him.

No, he's a complete stranger to the joys of prayer. Joy in God in prayer. And of course he reads his Bible, but he's not enjoying hearing the voice of the Son of God, hearing his shepherd and doing all that he says.

[14 : 58] There's no hungering and thirsting in his heart to know him better. He simply checks the box for daily Bible reading and feels better about himself for having done so.

And looks down his nose at all those people at church that don't even know whether Ephesians is in the Old Testament or New Testament. And yes, he has a good attendance at public worship.

He wouldn't think of missing, but he has no personal dealings with the Lord Jesus in worship. He doesn't sing the words of the song right into the ears of Jesus. He doesn't listen to the preaching and reading of the word as if the Lord Jesus stood in the midst and was speaking to him.

There's no standing in awe in his presence, no delighting to have him present in the worshipping family of God.

Yes, he puts some money in the offering box, but you could never describe him as a cheerful giver. He's reluctant to give his hard-earned money. He does not give it with gladness to the one who gave his all for him.

[16 : 12] And his Christian service, yes, it's done, but it's just dutifully done with no joy in serving others and doing it as unto the Lord, no sense of privilege that Jesus Christ should use the likes of him in furthering his kingdom.

So, all of his religion, you can sum it all up, and he's very careful about it and very fastidious about it, but it's missing the ingredient of joyful fellowship with Jesus Christ.

The Lord Jesus could stay a thousand miles away from his religion and he would not be missed.

Now, that's the older brother working in his father's field without enjoying his father's presence.

There's no joyful, loving relationship between them at all. And so, this is a person who's a complete stranger to saving religion and to the joy of walking with the Lord.

He counts God's service as a burden and his laws as burdensome. And so, he serves with a slave-like spirit. He's in bondage. And Paul says, we have not received that kind of spirit.

[17 : 29] You did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you receive the spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, Abba, Father. We are working for our father and his service is a joy.

And so, we serve in the new way of the spirit, not in the old way of the written code. We serve as happy sons, not as joyless slaves. So, what about you?

Is the Christian life a boring burden to you? Is Jesus Christ and fellowship with him in the whole of your life in service to God the thing that causes you great joy?

Beware of the danger of religion. Of religion without a relationship with the precious Lord Jesus.

Joyless religion, that's what they were, what they had. And secondly, we see in these people their high view of self. Notice what the son, the older son says in verse 29.

[18 : 49] All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Wow.

He views himself as the perfect son, doesn't he? Never disobeyed you. And because of that, he thinks he deserves better treatment than what the father's been giving him.

You never gave a young goat to celebrate with my friends. Me, the one that's been so good. Me, the dutiful son. Why does he feel so good about himself?

Because he's comparing himself with his younger brother, who he won't even own as his younger brother. This son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes.

Yeah, he looks pretty good beside the son wasting his substance and wild living. And so these Pharisees were the ninety-nine righteous sheep who need no repentance in verse seven.

[19 : 52] Just ask them and they'll tell you. That's what they are. They never disobeyed an order. Oh, Jesus preached repentance for entrance into the kingdom of God.

But that's for these other people over here, the tax collectors and the prostitutes and the outward sinners, the non-religious group. We've never disobeyed.

We're very careful to obey God's commands. They were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else.

Remember the Pharisees' prayer in the temple in Jesus' story. I thank you that I am not like other men. I haven't sinned like he or like she.

Now, that's the root problem with these people. These religious people that Jesus is pointing out, they did not see their own sinfulness and unworthiness to receive God's kindness and favor.

[20 : 52] They were blinded by their own self-love, by their own pride. They loved themselves too much to detect or hate their own sins. Psalm 36 tells us.

When in reality, the older brother, as much as the younger brother needed to come to his senses, he's dreaming, he's out cold, he's in another world. He's not interpreting reality correctly.

He needs to come to his senses, to wake up to life as it really is, indeed to his own sin. He needs sovereign grace to wake him up from this sleep of death.

And once awakened, you know what he'd find? He would find that his own righteousness that he's so proud of is really an embarrassment of filthy rags. And he would find that he was as far from the perfect son as the younger brother was.

That he was missing the whole loving relationship of the son with the father as much as his younger brother missed. first. The greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

[22:12] And he didn't even get to that first base in religion. He is just as bad as his younger brother. And though his feet never left his father's house, his heart was in a far country, far from his father's heart.

These Pharisees were never far from the outward forms of religion. Often in the temple. Often at prayer. Often with the scriptures.

But they were far from God. Remember Jesus' words about them? These people come near to me. They come near to me, but only with their mouth.

And they honor me with their lips. But as for their hearts, they are far from me. You see, the older brother, his heart was in a far country too.

Far from God. Even though his feet never left the father's estate. And you can be regularly in church where God meets with his people and still be far from God.

[23:20] Beware of the dangers of religion. They can be hazardous to your spiritual health. What about you? Do you see your sin? Do you see your need for Jesus Christ?

Do you see that your sins are so great that it will take the death of the Son of God? Him being damned in your place to satisfy God on your behalf.

These Pharisees never saw it. They were righteous in their own eyes. And you know when someone's righteous in his own eyes, he's always very harsh in his judgments of others.

And that's exactly what we see. He's looking down at his younger brother. And he's not happy when the kingdom of God is offered to the likes of his younger brother. He's not happy when the younger brother comes home and gets all this fussing over him by the father.

And so the religious, self-righteous crowd cannot bear that unworthy sinners should be freely given the kingdom of God when they slave so hard to earn it.

[24:35] I worked so hard. I slave so hard. And you just give it freely to this guy who doesn't even try. Now that brings us to the third problem with these self-righteous people represented by the older brother.

Joyless religion, high view of self, and thirdly, a faulty view of the gospel. This older brother is ticked. Verse 28 says, the older brother became angry and refused to go in.

Now, notice where his anger is directed. He's not only angry at his younger brother for getting all this treatment. He is angry at his father.

He's seething with resentment toward his father. Why? Because he has joyfully received back the prodigal son with feasting and celebration. He's not only, and so the older brother not only refused to go in and participate, he's downright angry at his father that he's even having such a feast for his brother.

Look, he says, all these years I've been slaving for you and you never, and never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends, but when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him.

[25:59] He's just like a little kid saying it's not fair. It's not fair. And he charges his father with wrongdoing, doesn't he? He wants everything to be meted out according to merit.

He wants his father to treat each of them according to what they deserve. He sees himself as worthy of celebration. After all I slaved and never disobeyed.

But not this younger brother of mine. He messed up royally. He squandered your property with prostitutes. He should pay. But instead when he returns you reward him.

You kill the fattened calf for him. It's not right. So he's mad that his younger brother doesn't get what he should have coming to him and instead he gets what he doesn't deserve.

That's what rips him off. And this reflects the fundamental air of the Pharisees. Indeed of many in the religious crowd their idea is that God's favor could be earned and merited as a payment for their work done for their holy life lived that God then gives his kindness and his favors his kingdom to them.

[27:17] So they worked hard at religion. They slaved away at law keeping. And they were pretty good at it in their estimation. They certainly didn't act like this younger brother and the sinners that he represented.

They're worthy of entering the kingdom. They deserved God's favor. So the Pharisees view the kingdom of God as an exclusive club for the worthy.

Tax collectors, prostitutes, they need not apply. And they did nothing to seek out sinners. They did nothing to call them to repent and enter the kingdom.

And they had no joy at all when Jesus did. But notice what Jesus is saying in this parable. He is saying once again that entry into the kingdom of God is not a matter of a man's deservingness. But always and ever has been a matter of grace. I've not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. It's for the unworthy.

[28:23] Indeed for those who come to see themselves as unworthy. That's who the kingdom of God is for. The one who comes and pleads for mercy. God be merciful to me a sinner.

That man goes home justified. The religious man who never sees his unworthiness is not right before God. Do you see what angers the self-righteous religious folk?

Jesus' gospel puts everyone on a level field. Jesus' gospel puts everyone on level ground.

Whatever their past may be, whether very religious or totally non-religious.

Whether slaving at law keeping, or wasting wealth in wild living. All stand condemned to hell for their sins. And all are so sinful that the Son of God must die to redeem them from sin.

All are unworthy of heaven. All are in need of a righteousness outside of their own. All live alone by pure unmerited mercy. All must receive forgiveness as a free gift that they do not deserve.

[29:36] serve. And all are saved in spite of their bad works. And all are saved in spite of their good works. And all are saved by grace alone.

The ground is level at the cross, someone has said. And that was too much for these righteous do-gooders to swallow. to have to beg for mercy alongside of the worst of sinners.

That was too much. And so they muttered and they complained and refused to rejoice in the repentance of these sinners. What about you? Where do you stand?

Could it be the reason you have no joy in the salvation of sinners who repent because you yourself have never tasted the joy of sins forgiven freely by grace?

You've never begged for mercy. You've never stood alongside that thief on the cross who'd never done a good thing in his life and yet received mercy at the last hour.

[30:39] You've not been worthy to stand, willing to stand beside him and say, Jesus have mercy on me the sinner. And to rejoice in his salvation even as you rejoice in your own. Isn't it something that the Lord Jesus found that the way to heaven was misunderstood in his day?

And misunderstood not just by the common folk but by spiritual leaders, the teachers, the ones that should have known, who had the scriptures.

The apostle Paul found it to be the same, didn't he? He had grown up under this misunderstanding of the gospel. And after his conversion he fights against it with all within him.

That it's not by works lest any man should boast. I say it's incredible that that whole generation of Jews who had the revelation of God, they had the scriptures, they had the gospel, and yet they were ignorant of God's way of righteousness.

God's way to become right with him. And because they were ignorant of that, they went about to establish their own righteousness. You know, it was the same 500 years ago in Europe.

[32:02] Gross ignorance of God's way of righteousness covered the nations. Martin Luther and John Calvin and John Knox and other reformers had their eyes opened by grace to see that righteousness comes not by our keeping of the law, but by Jesus Christ's keeping of the law.

That it's all of grace that when we had broken God's law and deserved eternal damnation, God saw us in our helplessness and sent his son to obey in our stead and to die in our stead.

They saw that in the scriptures and began to preach it. And hence the Protestant Reformation was born. But the Catholic Church had added to Christ's works a man's own efforts at law keeping and their own following of the sacraments and their own, the works of religion that would merit salvation, the works of the saints that could be brought into through the buying of indulgences.

And Luther himself, we remember, as a monk, had done his best to follow the Roman Catholic system. But he never could do enough to make himself right with God.

It was only when he came to rest on Jesus' perfect life and Jesus' atoning death that he found peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And that's what he preached.

[33:37] But you know what I find today? I find that our world today is in the same position as the first century and as the 16th century before the Protestant Reformation.

The gospel's lost. People don't know the good news. not just lost in Judaism as it was in the first century or in Roman Catholicism as it was in the 16th century but now lost in Protestant churches.

They do not know the doctrine of justification, the Bible doctrine of how a man is made right with God. When you ask a person on the street oh sure they've been to church they're Presbyterian they're Luther and they're Baptist they're this they're that they know the good people go to heaven and the bad people go to hell.

Ask them why they think they're going to heaven and they tell you because they've been pretty good or they go to church or they've been baptized they believe in God they try hard to keep the Ten Commandments they haven't killed anyone God is love.

I haven't wasted my money in riotous living. That's what they're saying they're saying exactly as if their sins are so insignificant and their work so worthy that the one offsets the other and God ought to be pleased to welcome them into heaven.

[35:28] we've returned to the dark ages where the gospel is hidden. It's a time for a new reformation it's a time for us to take to our world and to anyone who will hear us a glorious message of salvation through the works of Christ alone.

His life lived perfectly to cover our sinful living. His blood His death suffered to take the punishment that we deserved.

It's all Him. It's all what He's done. That's the message that saves. Our world needs to hear it afresh. Yes these religious people there's danger in religion to thinking you're so good as to not need the righteousness of Jesus completely to cover not just your bad works but your good works your religious works.

There's enough sin in your best work to damn you to hell forever. That's the Bible teaching. It must be all in Jesus that we glory. Before we leave this passage I want you to see that the Lord Jesus seeks all kinds of sinners.

The Lord Jesus seeks all kinds of sinners. Usually when we hear that phrase that Jesus is the friend of sinners we think of the tax collectors and the prostitutes and there's a reason we think that because the Pharisees were accusing him of having been the friend of such people.

[37:04] But I want to tell you this morning that Jesus is the friend of all kinds of sinners. Even self righteous religious people with their nose in the air. The Pharisees the scribes the teachers of the Lord Jesus did not shun them either.

He went after them. He sought them. In the parable we find the father who represents Jesus.

Not only seeking and finding the younger son but he also goes after his oldest son. Don't read over that. Verse 28 When the older brother became angry and refused to go in the father went out and pleaded with him.

He didn't just wait for him to come in. Well if he's not coming then I guess he's not he's not meant to be here at the party. No he went out. He leaves the party. The shepherd leaves the ninety and nine and he goes out looking for the one that's lost.

And the father goes out and finds his older brother. The older brother. His older son. And he urges him to come in and partake of the feast.

[38:19] He patiently listens to his angry complaint and tenderly answers him and seeks to reason with him. Listen to him in verse 31.

My son you're always with me and everything I have is yours. I've not wronged you. I've not withheld wrongfully from you.

You have me. You have all my riches always at your disposal. The fact is you see that he didn't appreciate his father's presence any more than the younger son.

He had every opportunity to be close to his father. And he didn't like his father. He had no joy in his father or in serving him. He clearly had nothing to complain about.

His privileges he had scorned. And so the father says don't you see son we had to celebrate and be glad. That's a word of necessity.

[39:17] We had to. We didn't have a choice in the matter. We had to. Why? Because of what happened. Because this brother of yours he is your brother.

Because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again he was lost and is found. Now when you take that out of the parable and put it into spiritual realities that Jesus is talking about this is why we have to rejoice when a sinner is saved.

Because what we experience when a sinner is found and when a sinner is saved is we experience someone who was dead. Spiritually dead. No responsiveness of love in his heart to God.

No responsiveness in his heart to joy and fellowship with God in obeying him and serving him. That dead person comes to life as really as Lazarus came forth from the grave and is a new man with new sensory perceptions, new tastes, new delights, new mind, new will.

That's what happens. The dead are raised to life. The lost, the spiritual reality of being lost friends is to go to hell, to be lost forever, to forfeit an eternal life.

[40:26] The lost has been found. We had to. We had to celebrate and be glad. No father could do less.

You see, son, this feast is not the prodigal's reward for some behavior of his. This feast is about my joy in seeing him return back to me.

Could you not rejoice with me in the return of this son, this brother of yours? You Pharisees, you rejoice when one of your sheep goes away and is found and brought back.

In fact, you rejoice so much you call your neighbors and friends to come and rejoice with you. And when you lose a silver coin, you rejoice when it's found. Some of you have had prodigal sons yourselves and you know the joy you've had when the son has come back home.

Should not I rejoice when one that I created for myself and my pleasure, who spurned me and went off into the far country of sin and is brought to his senses and brought back and found and the dead now lives, should I not rejoice?

[41:47] We had to. We just had to. And shall you not rejoice with me? Do you see something of the tender-hearted pleading of Jesus with self-righteous, snobbish, religious people?

Oh, there were harsh words for the Pharisees. I know about Matthew 23 and there's a time for such words but we also find our Savior seeking and even saving.

Pharisees, don't we? Remember that man Nicodemus? He went and Nicodemus came and he talked with him that night. He told him, Nicodemus, I know you're religious but you're not going to make it unless you're born again.

You need to know that. I know you're the teacher in Israel but you're so sinful that unless you are born again you will never see much less enter the kingdom of heaven. Shocking.

But it was love that told him and you must believe on me that just as the serpent was lifted up in the wilderness and whoever looked lived, so the Son of God will be lifted up and whoever believes on him will not perish but have everlasting life.

[42:59] Nicodemus, Pharisee that you are, look and live. Believe and live. And he's invited to Simon the Pharisee's house. He didn't say, oh those self-righteous religious snobs, not going to have anything to do with them.

No, he went. Didn't he? He sat down and ate. He talked with him and he listened to him and he was insulted by him and all the rest. But he sought to teach him and to show him of his lack of love, of his need for forgiveness of sins.

Jesus going after the religious snobs as well as the prostitutes and tax collectors. Beautiful picture of our Savior. He's no different today.

He welcomes both kind of sinners to come by way of repentance and faith and to enter the joy of their Lord. And so that's where the parable ends with the father outside pleading with his self-righteous older son.

Well, what happened, you say? Well, I don't know what happened. And really what happens is not the most important thing, is it? Or Jesus would have told us. You know the most important thing?

[44:19] Is what happens with you and me. Are we the self-righteous ones that scorn the others? Then what happens with you and me? Do we repent of our self-righteousness and do we receive salvation freely as the gift of God and enter into the joy of sinners returning?

And do we seek them out with our Savior and call them to the Lord Jesus and to eternal life? what will you do as the Lord Jesus has been teaching and pleading with us with his truth?

You see, our response to the wicked when they receive God's grace reveals the true condition of our heart. This is a revealing thing. When a wicked person gets saved, do we rejoice in them receiving the the full blessings of eternal life?

When we perhaps never went down that same trail of sin, the Pharisees were exposed by their response to be strangers to the saving grace.

They never had tasted the saving grace of God in Christ. And it's seen in their response. You see, those on the outside never understand the joy of the redeemed and of the redeemer.

[45:40] because they haven't experienced it. J.C. Ryle says, nothing ought to give us greater pleasure than the conversion of souls.

And he goes on to say something like this, and I've translated it into the 21st century. There are those of you who rejoice in sports and fashions and money and hobbies and cars and houses, but not in the conversion of wicked sinners.

And it gives reason to suspect that you have not tasted the grace of God yourself. Hard words.

And it needs to be balanced alongside this statement, that there may be a degree of the Pharisee's spirit in even a believer's heart.

A degree of the Pharisee's spirit may be remaining in you. It may exist in you. You can get so out of touch that even for a moment, we're not sympathizing with the joy of our Savior in the repentance of sinners.

[46:59] Jesus warned his own disciples to beware of the leaven of Phariseeism. the answer is to strive to keep yourself amazed at the grace of God.

That's the answer. And it will take some striving to keep yourself amazed at the grace of God. It's one thing to sit here and sing, amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. It is another thing altogether to truly be amazed that there is any goodness in God for a wretch like you. That's a different thing, brother, sister.

Such a heart will have no problem rejoicing when a fellow wretch finds grace in the Lord Jesus. But we are in a dangerous condition when we no longer are amazed at God's grace toward us.

Witness Jonah the prophet. prophet. He didn't want to seek and save the Ninevites, did he? They didn't deserve to be spared.

[48:07] He wanted them destroyed. And so when God, in answer to Jonah's preaching, brings the Ninevites to repent and spares them from destruction, Jonah is not rejoicing.

He's angry. You remember how bitter and full of resentment at God he is for having spared the Ninevites, the repentant. And who is he to be up here on his throne with anger?

Well, he would be that sinning prophet that the Lord not long ago, perhaps just 40 days ago, had rescued when he was going down for the last time.

And God sent graciously a fish to swallow him and transport him to dry land. You see, this self-righteous spirit is a especially ugly in those who live by grace alone.

The only reason Jonah's alive is because God was gracious to him. And how ugly such a spirit is in one who depends entirely upon the grace of God to us.

[49:15] But we can easily drift back into this pharisaical spirit of the older brother. And we must strive to keep ourselves amazed at the grace of God.

I give you that for your topic of discussion around the tables today, in your home, in the foyer. How can we keep ourselves amazed at the grace of God?

It's something that I haven't found the answer to practically in my life. I mean, I'm not there. I have to strive. I have to work hard to keep myself amazed at grace.

But I know that it involves a few things. It involves, first of all, getting the view of God's holiness. Just how holy he is. His law.

What he requires of us. It involves knowing something of my sinfulness. And it involves something of understanding what Christ had to suffer to save me as if there was nobody else on the planet.

[50:19] But me to save, that had to happen to save me. And I want to tell you, you who have been religious all your life and you grew up in Christian homes, you were a PK, you were an MK, you were a church-going kid, you don't have to have been saved from a far country of sin like the prodigal in order to be amazed at God's grace to you.

You just need to be awakened to your sin, to see yourself for who you are and to see God for who he is and Jesus Christ for who he is and you can be amazed, you can live in amazement every day that you're a Christian.

The elements are there, reality is such. Our eyes would only be open to it and our hearts be meditating upon it. We might see we are indeed daily debtors to this grace of God in Jesus Christ. May he make it so. Let's pray together right now that he would do so. Thank you Lord Jesus for understanding us and speaking to our hearts words that we need to hear.

Thank you for understanding our own struggles even as Christians with self-righteousness such that we're not as amazed as we ought to be at your grace to us.

[51 : 46] Come and help us. Come and lift up before our eyes your holiness our sinfulness in such a way that our sins would look ugly our Savior would look beautiful and grace would always look amazing.

We ask it for your praise and for our everlasting good. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.