

23.3.25: The Father and two Sons

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Date: 23 March 2025

Preacher: Corey Brock

[0 : 00] Good morning. Good morning. A warm welcome to the service this morning. It's good to see all of you, those in the building, those online as well, although we can't see you. And it's good to have a number of visitors with us this morning as well.

There's tea and there's coffee at the end of the service. If you're able to stay behind, please do so. It would be good to get a chance to meet and to enjoy fellowship together. This morning, as well as welcoming all of you, I want to welcome Corey and Heather and the family who are with us.

Corey is a minister in St. Columbus. He conducted Cairo and Sarah's wedding here on Friday and he lectures in ETS in Edinburgh. So, Corey has given us value for money.

He's catching a ferry soon, but he's preaching this morning and thank you, Corey, for being willing to do that and we look forward to hearing God's word through you today.

This evening, we'll continue the service as a six and we'll continue our studies in Matthew. So, rather than going back to Genesis in the evening, I'll take the morning study and we'll continue in Matthew chapter 13 this evening.

[1 : 09] There's 20 odd notices on an email and on the screen, so I'm not going to take time to go through all the notices, but I'll highlight just a couple of things. The first is to say that next Sunday, the morning service will be led by Gordon MacLeod.

The evening service is a Gaelic service and that will be taken by the Reverend Donald Dolan McDonald. And then at half past seven, there's the monthly fellowship, which has been organised by Peggy and Jane and E&A; and Mahela.

Just so everybody knows that that's what's organised. I expect to be away from this coming Friday the 28th through to the 7th of April.

I'm doing the Communion Weekend in Greyfriars for Ian McCritchie. And so I appreciate your prayers from Saturday and Sunday for these services and then taking a few days on the mainland. So, during that time when I'm away, if there are any pastoral issues, you can speak to one of the elders in the first instance as usual and the Reverend Andrew Coggle is available if anyone needs to speak to a minister.

[2 : 21] Two more things. The first is from Sarah and Kyle. They sent a message through just to say, thank you to the congregation to everyone who helped on Friday, especially the ladies that did the catering and Stuart and David Cameron and Renai for helping with the logistics and the live stream.

So, just a word of thanks from them. Also, I've got a notice regarding the ladies conference the day yesterday. So, a very big thank you to all who prepared for and served and cleared up after the ladies conference yesterday.

A particular thanks to the speakers, Mary Smith, Mary's sister here, and also to Anna McCray and to all who attended. So, these, I think, are all the notices.

We'll begin this time of worship and I'm going to read just before we sing. And we'll read the verses that Scott preached from last Sunday evening.

Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great the cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which gings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, before the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

[3 : 53] Let us sing now to God's praise and we'll sing from Mission Praise 51, the words on the scene, Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart.

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart, Lord be all else.

We sing of Thou art, Thou my best Lord, my day or my night, breaking our singing, Thy presence my light, Be Thou my wisdom, Thou my true word, I ever with Thee, Thou with me, Lord, Thou my great Father, I thy true Son, Thou with me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Be Thou my battle, shield storm for the fight, Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight, Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my night, Thou my night, Thou my night, Praise Thou be heavenward, O power of my heart.

Yes, I heed not your man's empty face. Thou mine in heaven's love and always.

[6 : 19] Thou art the only first in my heart. My King of heaven, my treasure, the heart.

My King of heaven, after victory won. May I reach heaven's signs, O bright and sun.

Heart of my own heart, whatever before. Still be my vision, O ruler of all.

Let's unite our hearts in prayer together.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you that we are able to gather together this Lord's Day.

[7 : 35] We thank you for the promise that we return to so often that where two or three gather in the name of the Lord Jesus, you have promised that you will be here with us and we pray that we would not only know that as a fact that your word teaches us, but we pray that we would experience that in our hearts, that we would know the presence of God, that we would know the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

So that as the word of God is signed, as the word of God is read and preached, that it would have impact, that it would be pressed into our lives, into our hearts, into our souls.

And Lord, we pray that you would sanctify us by the truth of your word, that you would be working in us, that we would see week by week that we are great sinners, but that Jesus Christ is our great saviour.

And we do confess as we come before you, the God who is holy, that you are sinners. We read in Hebrews of the sin that so easily entangles us, that clings to us so closely.

And we confess that to be an experience, even as we think back over past days. We likely can think about things that we've said and thought and done and left undone, which speak to us of the sin that we hate and yet the sin that clings to us with the Apostle Paul.

[9 : 06] We are so often finding the good that I want to do, I don't do, and the evil I don't want to do. I'm stuck in that again. But we thank you that as he comes to the end of that passage in Romans 7, that it's that thanksgiving for the Lord Jesus, the one who delivers us, the one who saves us from sin.

And we thank you, Lord Jesus, for coming into this world, for enduring the cross, even with joy, knowing that through the cross, sinners like us could be saved.

And we pray for each person who is here, each home that is represented, every heart, every head bowed before you this morning. We ask, Lord, that every one of us would be those who cry out from our hearts, Lord, have mercy upon me, the sinner.

Because we thank you that that prayer is a prayer that saves. That is a prayer that comes with the promise of justification. We thank you that as we call out for mercy, as we call upon the name of the Lord, we have the promise that there is salvation, that there is abundant grace.

So enable us, we pray, each one of us, even now, to echo that prayer, to receive the grace of Jesus. And we ask, Lord God, that you would be working in us, conforming us more and more to the image of Christ, that we would be more Christ-like in our actions, in our reactions, in our thoughts, in our words, in our deeds, that we may bring glory to you, that we would remember that we are to seek first, not last, but first your kingdom.

[10 : 46] And we would remember that our chief end in this world is to glorify God. And we thank you that there is joy in living that way. So bless us, Lord, we pray, on this day as we seek to worship you.

We thank you for all who are here. We think of some of you who are here with us for the last time in a while. We think of Ian and Mackenzie and Nancy. We thank you for them, for being with us over these years.

And as they prepare to go from here on to the mainland, we ask, Lord, that you would go before them, that you would go with them, that you would bless them, that you would make them a blessing. We thank you that, although we are separated at times in this world through geography and through seasons, we thank you that we are bound together eternally in Christ.

And so we pray for your blessing to be upon them. And upon them as a family. We think of the young child, even that Mackenzie carries, that we have never yet met. And we ask, Lord, that you would bless that child also. We thank you that even in the womb, you're the God who knows us. And we pray for Fiona as well, here this morning, with Scott and the girls, as she has passed her due date yesterday, we ask, Lord, that you would protect her and the child that she carries.

[12:06] We thank you for the prospect of new life. And we ask, Lord, for your hand of protection and your hand of blessing to be upon them as a family, especially at this time, with so much excitement.

We ask, Lord, that you would draw near to them. We pray also for those who struggle this morning. We're always conscious of those who are struggling. We pray for Neil Cameron. We thank you for him being able to be here on Friday. We thank you for Kyle and for Sarah. And for the joy of being able to witness them coming together in marriage. We pray that you would bless them as a couple and that Christ would be at the centre of that marriage as we knew the experience of Christ at the centre of the service on Friday. On Friday. We pray that you would bless them. We pray for Neil, having been here on Friday and now in hospital today. We ask, Lord, that you would touch him, that he would know your presence, that he would know your peace, that he would know his strength increasing and that he would know your hand of healing upon him.

[13:18] So bless us, Lord, we pray. We thank you for Corey and for Heather and for the family with us today as well. Bless Corey as he prepares to lead us, as he opens your word.

And we ask that you would help him, not only today, but each day, as he ministers in St. Columbus, as he lectures in ETS. We pray that he would know your help and your strength.

We thank you also for those who met here yesterday for the ladies' conference. And we pray that the word that was read and shared, that it would be blessed, that it would take root in the hearts of all who are present.

Thank you for Mary being able to speak with the ladies on that day. And we pray that all that was done would continue to be a blessing in all those who attended.

So hear our prayers. Go before us in this day. Take away our sin. Empty us of self. Fill us with the Holy Spirit. Lead us and guide us in worship, we pray. We pray this in Jesus' name.

[14:19] Amen. Amen. Boys and girls, would you like to come forward, please? Amen.

This bit here is not the children's talk, but when I had my eyes closed in the prayer there, I moved my hand for a second and I bumped into the cup and I spilled it.

And it brought back the memories. I was a clumsy child. And every time I would spill something, which was most days, my mother would say, Oh, scooch, I'm sick.

Never knew really what that meant, but I knew it wasn't a compliment. So the only day that she's here and I managed to knock over a glass of water, so I'm just hearing in my head, Oh, scooch. Anyway, boys and girls, I've got a couple of pictures, I think, to show you on the screen, hopefully. Thank you, Anne.

[15:28] Do you know what happened here on Friday? You do know what happened here on Friday, don't you? Kyle and Sarah were married, so that's a picture of them on one of the beaches as they're getting a photograph.

I think there's another picture of them at the front of the church there when everybody's throwing the confetti all over the place. So they were married on Friday. It was a lovely day.

It was a great fun day and we really enjoyed being able to see them coming together and being married. But here's a question for you.

What do you need in order for two people to be married? Sure now. Love. Love. They have to love each other, don't they?

And they promised, they said in front of everybody that they loved each other and you could see that in the way that they were towards each other. They loved each other. What else do you need for people to be married?

[16:34] What do you think, Michael? You know what she says. A million miles away from my life. Pardon? Yeah. Yeah.

We'll get there. Michael always goes straight to the main point. He says Jesus. And that is what keeps our marriage strong. It's having Jesus at the centre. Calum, are you going to say something?

What are you going to say? You have to find a girl. You have to find a girl. Calum, you'll have no problem with that. I'm quite sure. You'll get a few farming after the service.

But see when I speak to people about weddings, and see if you meet a couple and they're planning a wedding, they're talking about a million things. They're getting stressed out over dresses and cakes and flowers and hotels and confetti and there's a million things.

Flowers and bushes, you can see them from the wedding there. And all that takes time and all that takes preparation. And sometimes they get really stressed out over all these things. And all these things are nice.

[17:46] But actually, for a wedding, we don't really need flowers. We don't actually need a cake. You could get married without an amazing expensive dress or a kilt.

You could get married without a hotel. All you actually need for the man and the woman to be married is two words.

Do you know what the two words are on the day? I do. Are you going to say that, Sean? Yeah. I do. So Corey asked Kyle, I think this is what he said, do you take this woman to be your wedding wife, to be your wedding wife, to live with her, to love her, to honour her and cherish her for as long as you both shall live?

Do you? That's what he said. Then he turned to Sarah and he said to Sarah, do you take this man to be your wedding husband, to live with him, to love him, honour him and cherish him for as long as you both shall live?

Do you? And they both responded, because they love each other and because they want to be with each other and because they trust each other, what do you think they both said?

[19:14] Sean? I do. I do. And now, they're married. So we've got Mr. and Mrs. McKinnon and a happy family over there.

What I wanted to ask you very simply this morning, boys and girls, is have you said I do to Jesus? Because Jesus loves you with a love that is so strong that he was willing to come from heaven into this world and go to the cross and die to take our sin away so that we could be with him forever. Jesus loves you enough to want to be your saviour, to be your lord, to be your king, to be your friend. And he asks you right the way through the Bible, will you take me to be your saviour and your friend and your lord and your king?

And you and I, if we're going to be Christians, we have to say I do. We can hear him asking us a thousand times as we sit in the chairs, will you take me into your life?

And we might not respond and never become Christians. So we actually have to pray and say, please Lord Jesus, take away my sin.

[20:54] Come into my life. Be my saviour. Be my lord. And if we do that, he promises he will come and he will stay with us forever. So boys and girls, I want to encourage you to say I do to Jesus.

Will we pray now? Lord Jesus, we thank you that you love us. We thank you that we know that you love us and we can go to the cross to see how much you love us.

And we pray that you would help us to trust you. And when we think about all that you've done for us, we know that we can trust you more than we can trust anyone. But sometimes we hear your call and we don't respond.

Sometimes we can do that when we're young. Sometimes there can be people even in their 70s and 80s who've heard Jesus speak a hundred times and never responded.

Help us, we pray, every one of us as we hear your voice to respond and believe in and trust in you, Lord Jesus, and saying, I do want you to be my saviour, Lord and King.

[22:04] And I pray for the children especially that they would trust you, that they would receive you into their lives. when they are young and that they would walk with you all the days of their lives. And we pray for Sarah and for Kyle and we ask that you would bless them especially and that as Michael said, that Jesus would be at the centre of their marriage today and every day.

And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. We'll sing now to God's praise. We'll sing from Mission Praise 1008, the paraphrase of Psalm 23, And what's my shepherd I will not want.

And what's my shepherd I'll not want.

He makes me lie in pasture's dream He leads me by the still, still water His goodness restores my soul And I will trust in you alone And I will trust in you alone For your endless mercy follows me Your goodness will lead me home He adds my ways in righteousness And he anoints my head with

oil And my cup is overflows with joy

I feast on his purity lies And I will trust in you alone And I will trust in you alone For your endless mercy follows me Your goodness will lead me home And though I walk the darkest path I will not fear the evil one For you are with me and you're wrought and stuck And the comfort I need to know And I will trust in you alone And I will trust in you alone

[25 : 07] For your endless mercy follows me Your goodness will lead me home Okay boys and girls If you head through to Sunday school I'll pay for them as they go And Cody will now come and lead us Next to service, I can't believe We're going to read together From the Gospel of Luke Chapter 15 Verses 11 Down to the end of the chapter Verse 32 And this is often called

The parable of the prodigal son So hear God's word And Jesus 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 is coming to me And he divided his property between them Not many days later The younger son gathered all he had And he took a journey into the far country And there he squandered his property And reckless living And when he had spent everything A severe famine arose in that country And he began to be in need So he went and he hired himself out To one of the citizens of that country Who sent him into his field to feed pigs And he was longing to be fed with the pods That the pigs ate And no one gave him anything But when he came to himself He said How many of my father's hired servants Have more than enough bread But I perish here with hunger I will arise and go to my father And I will say to him Father I have sinned against heaven

And before you I am no longer worthy To be called your son Treat me as one of your hired servants And he arose And he came to his father But While he was still a long way off His father saw him And felt compassion And ran And embraced him And kissed him And the son said to him Father I have sinned against heaven And before you I am no longer worthy To be called your son But The father said to his servants Bring quickly the best robe And put it on him And put a ring on his hand And shoes on his feet And bring the fattened calf And kill it And let us eat And celebrate For this my son Was dead And is alive again He was lost And is found And they began to celebrate Now His older son Was in the field And as he came And drew near to the house He heard music And dancing And he called One of the servants And asked What these things meant And he said to him Your brother has come And your father Has killed the fattened calf

Because he has received him back Safe and sound But he was angry And he 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 command Yet you never gave me 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 The 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 This is God's holy word Let's sing together Before we look at it From Psalm 51 A Gaelic Psalm The first three verses Two stanzas Together And it says After thy loving kindness Lord Have mercy upon me Let's sing

Dear friends Dear friends Dear friends Dear friends Dear friends Dear friends Dear friends CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS

[30 : 46] CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[33 : 13] Thank you. Thank you.

Amen. Well, this is probably the most famous of Jesus' parables, one of the greatest stories that Jesus ever told. And a lot of people will say this is one of the greatest stories ever told in world history, the parable that's often called the prodigal son.

And fundamentally, it's about grace. It's about God's radical grace for us. And there's a way of talking about grace from this parable and reading the rest of the Bible in the light of this parable, where you can simply think of grace as the fact that we ran away from God and we were lost in a far country, and God came into the far country to bring us home, and He wants to throw a feast for us after He does it.

And that's God's grace, and that's what this parable is all about. And if you're much of a reader in Christian literature, Christian books, you might know that in the past five to ten years, there have been a lot of publications about the parable of the prodigal son.

And I've learned a lot from those publications. And so I just want to come this morning and unpack this passage with you and offer you a bit of the insights that have been gathered, really a recovery of what this passage is really all about from the way the church has engaged with it for 2,000 years now.

[34 : 42] And so let's do that together. One of the things the commentators say really frequently is that this parable is like a theater performance, a play, a stage play. And it's in two acts.

Act 1 is about the prodigal son. Act 2, about the elder brother. So it's really clearly laid out that way. And one of the things you can do today is you can come and ask the question, Who am I?

As we read this, as we look at it. So every single one of us, no matter what you believe, no matter where you're from, no matter if you're from faraway land like Mississippi in the United States or from Harris, we all find ourselves in this parable somewhere, either in the life of the prodigal son or the elder brother.

And yes, it's about two men for sure, but they're just symbols. It's about every man, every woman, every boy, every girl. It's for all of us. And so you can ask, Where am I in this as we look at it?

And so there are three things that we need to see to really understand it. Three questions, I think, that the passage answers for us. And the first is, Who needs grace? Grace. And then secondly, What grace is?

[35 : 47] What is grace? And then finally, the whole story of grace as we finish. So let's look at that together. First, who needs grace? Now when you try to understand a parable or really any passage of the Bible, one of the things you've got to do is ask, Who's the original audience that this was being written to, taught to?

And we have that. In verse 11, Jesus says, the beginning of this parable, There was a man, a father, who had two sons. And we have famously called this the parable of the prodigal son. But far better probably is at least to say this should be titled the parable of the two sons. Or the parable of the father and his two sons. And that's really helpful because when you go back and you ask, Who is the audience of this passage?

If you have a Bible, you can see that with me. If you back up to verse 1 and 2 of chapter 15. We didn't read it, but it's right at the beginning of the chapter. And it says, So first you've got tax collectors and sinners gathered around him.

And you well know that these are euphemisms. Tax collectors and sinners. Tax collectors is not as literal. These are Jewish people who effectively committed treason against their own people by serving the Romans, collecting taxes for the Romans.

[37 : 09] Hated in the first century by their brothers and sisters, the Jews. But the sinners is a euphemism. And the word sinner in Luke's gospel is just a word that really stands for people who have experienced public scandals.

So people who are known as the typical sinner. These are those that when you say the word sinner, you think of these types of people. People who have made big messes in their life.

Scandalous, public sinners, traditional sinners. The bad people in the eyes of the culture. That's the first part of the audience that Jesus is talking to. But if you look down from that, you see the next group.

And it says, when this group gathered and saw Jesus was talking to tax collectors and sinners and he was even eating with them. And in the first century, to eat at the table with somebody is a big deal.

A big deal. What happened? The Pharisees and the scribes gathered and they grumbled. And the Greek word is something more like muttered. You know, they were, it's passive aggressive. They were under their breath, sort of murmuring and muttering to each other about this Jesus who eats with sinners.

[38 : 14] The bad people in our culture. And he even brings them to his table. And these are the addicts and the greedy and the reckless with money and the sexually scandalous and the public drunk and the criminal and the messy people.

And he eats with them. And so the Pharisees and the scribes are there and they're grumbling and upset about this. And then we're told right after that, so Jesus told them a parable.

Now who is the them? It's not primarily, though the tax collectors and the sinners are there, it's not primarily for the tax collectors and sinners. It's for the Pharisees and the scribes. He told them a parable.

And he actually told them a series of three parables. In the three parables, he's directing a question at them because they are the religious leaders of the day. They're the very religious people.

The very good, morally decent, upright people. And so he tells them three parables. And they're all very famous in this chapter. The parable of the lost sheep. So if you've got a hundred sheep and you lose one of them, he says, Who among you would not go out and find that one and bring them home?

[39 : 16] Who's he talking to? The Pharisees. Who among you? Religious leaders. Good, respectable, decent people that say that you believe in the Lord would not go and rescue a sinner, a sheep, who's wandered away.

And then the second parable, the coin. A woman has a hundred coins and she loses one of them. Who among you would not flip your house upside down to find the one piece of currency?

Currency. Physical currency. In the first century, Greco-Roman Jewish world was a big deal. Most people didn't have it. So if you have a hundred coins and you lose one, it is a big deal. It's ten percent of your wealth.

And so she flips her house upside down. And you see, he's asking an implicit question. Religious leaders, morally upright people, good people. Would you go and chase the prodigal sons and daughters?

And would you bring them home? And if they come home, would you celebrate? Because every single time when they find something, there's a celebration, there's a party. Would you enjoy it? Would you celebrate if a sinner comes home?

[40 : 15] And so you see that very clearly when he gets to the third parable, the parable of the prodigal son, as we've often called it, it's the parable of the two sons in two acts, like a theater, like a stage play.

And the first is about the prodigal son. And the first audience that he's speaking to there is who? Tax collectors and sinners who are prodigal sons and daughters, right? But then that second act is the parable written to the elder brother.

And who's the elder brother? It's the second group of people that's sitting right in front of him, the Pharisees and the scribes, the religious people, the moral people, the decent people, the good people, that think they're better than the sinners and the tax collectors all around them.

And so you've got to see it in both acts. But if you were to ask, who is this parable primarily being spoken to? It's primarily being spoken to the religious, the decent, the respectable, the good.

And Jesus' genius in this very famous story is to say that each brother represents a way of being alienated from God.

[41 : 24] In each brother, there's a clear, visible way. Well, in the prodigal son, it's very visible. But in the elder brother, it's an invisible way of being alienated from God the Father.

Both represent something very important there. And the question from Luke is, who are we? Who are you? Where are you? We all are prone to wander, either as prodigal sons and daughters or elder brothers and sisters.

And he's saying, where are you in this passage? The main point, the main audience, you know, he didn't tell this parable primarily. You see, the tax collectors and the sinners were coming to Jesus' table because they knew they had a need.

They knew they needed forgiveness. They knew, I'm unworthy. But the primary audience is the elder brother and sister who comes and says, I am better than that person over there.

Not yet seeing, maybe very religious, but yet not yet seeing. They have a need to come home to the Father. And so the point of the parable is this. It is a warning to the reputable.

[42 : 27] It's a warning to the visibly decent, religious, morally upright person who, in their heart, invisibly, is another way of simply being prodigal, far away from the Lord.

So secondly then, what is the grace that Jesus is offering here? What is it? And so two acts, lots of different scenes here.

And in every one of the scenes of this story, there's a scandal that takes place. Okay, so act one, scene one, verse 11 and 12, the scandal of the request.

And here we've got the younger son who comes and asks his father for his share of the property. Now in this culture, in the first century, Greco-Roman Jewish culture, when a father dies, if there are two sons, the eldest gets two-thirds of the inheritance and the youngest gets one-third. And so this younger son is coming and saying, I want my third. And in this culture, it's an honor-shame culture to the max. Effectively, what this younger son is saying is, Dad, I'm ready for you to be dead.

[43 : 35] That's what he's saying to him. And he's saying, I want you to die so that I can get my third. Now, that is a scandal. And it's shameful. And the thing that we expect here in this culture, according to rabbinic literature we have from the time between the Old Testament and the New Testament, is the normal custom is that this son would be immediately banished, if not publicly punished, if not treated as a criminal, for saying this to his dad.

And here's the second scandal. What happens in verse 12 is the father actually does it. The father gives him what he asked for, which is against the tradition. And here the father, you know, today if something like this takes place, you could, in theory, go and just transfer your name on your bank account to your son's name.

But this is the first century. There's hardly any cash. There are no digital banking apps, you know. And so what has to happen? There's no money. He's got to go liquidate. He's got to go sell land, sell cattle, sell sheep to get the third, to then give him the currency, the money.

And he does it. He does it. And right here, commentators, Christian theologians, for centuries have come and said, look at this. You know, this takes us back all the way to Genesis chapter 3, where the first humans representing all of us looked at God and said, I don't want to be in your image. I want to be you. They said, I don't want you. I want the benefits. And in other words, we as sinners have been saying to the Lord for all of human history, I don't want to know you.

[45 : 10] I don't want you to be my master. No, I just want you to give me my third. And what does God do? He does it. And this is where we start to step towards grace. This is called common grace.

God lavishes on every single person. If you're drawing breath today, you're getting something we don't deserve. If we eat lunch today, we get something we don't deserve.

He lavishes on us even when we shake our fist at him. Even when we say, I don't want you, he continues to give sunshine and rain on a day like this, right? He pours it forth.

And so we start to see that what is grace? Grace is God's kindness, his favor, his willingness in the face of human hatred, of his shaking fist saying, I don't want God to be my master.

I don't want to be the image. I want to be God myself, right? And God yet gives gifts anyway. And that takes us to Act 1, Scene 3, Scene 2, I should say.

[46 : 09] And that's been called by others the scandal of the pigs. So from verse 13 to verse 16, we've got this kid, this young man. He's prodigal. The word in verse 13 is he engaged in reckless living, which is where we get the term prodigal.

It's just translated prodigal in some translations. And that means that he goes and he spends all of his money and he becomes homeless. And we're told by his brother down in verse 30 that he even traded his money for prostitutes.

So he's lived in every type of scandal you can imagine in the public sphere. And a famine strikes and he has nothing to eat. And he gives himself as a slave, an indentured servant in the first century to a man, a farm.

And he's working with pigs in a pigsty. And it says in verse 16, he even longs to eat the food that the pigs were eating. Now look, who's the primary audience?

Pharisees. And the Pharisees, if they know one thing, they know their Bible. And they know the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. And they know that in the Levitical law, the one thing you must not do, the one animal you must not be associated with is a pig.

[47 : 18] Right? And so they, in this moment, not only see this guy as spiritually bankrupt, morally bankrupt. But now they see him as ceremonially bankrupt.

That if he were even to come home, he is unclean. He cannot come into the presence of God's people. He can't come to the temple. And in other words, for a Pharisee, a scribe in the first century, they would think of this man, by tradition, as a beast.

He's living in a pigsty. He doesn't even get to eat the food that the pigs eat. He's lower. He's filthy. He's a beast in their eyes. He's an animal to them. And so this young man, scene three, verses 17 to 24, he, it says in verse 17, he came to himself.

His conscience was pricked. And he said, I'm a sinner. I have a big need. And so he concocts a plan. And his plan is, if I go back to my father's home and I get on my knees and I say to my dad, I will serve you as a slave.

That's the concept here. As a slave for years and years and years. At least I'll have food on my table. Maybe. Look, you see what he's doing? He's saying, if I perform.

[48 : 39] If I come to my father and I perform and I perform and I perform and I do what's good, good, good, good for long enough, maybe my father will receive me back into the household one day.

And the rabbis, the Pharisees, the scribes, when they heard something like this, they would have been saying, oh, this is good. This is exactly what we want to hear. Because for them, in their culture, they would have said, if you have violated community standards to the point that this young man has, step one, you're banished.

No chance you're coming home. Step two, if by a father's mercy you are allowed back in, you will work as a slave for year on year on year.

But you will never be called son again. So you've lost your status. Sonship can be lost. And this young man in the heart of the culture is thinking, boy, if I'm a good man, a good boy, if I just work hard and I do everything, he says, maybe one day he'll look at me and he'll love me.

Maybe. Right? And so that's what he does. He comes home. He comes home and he's, in verse 20, as he gets to the horizon, we're told that the father pulls up his robe.

[49 : 53] And the father runs out to the horizon, something a patriarch would have never done. He skips about, his dad skips about like a calf breaking forth from his stall at last.

Because he sees his boy, his son, on the horizon. And it says in the text that he fell, literally the Greek text translates to something like he fell upon him. The dad did.

And he kissed him and he embraced him. And he said, put your teary eyes in my shoulder. And then he turns to, you know, well, the young boy says, now it's time for my plan.

Father, I've sinned against you. And if you will only make me your servant. But his dad interrupts him. And he turns to his servant and he says, no, no, no. Go and get the best robe.

Okay, whose robe is the best robe in the house? It's dad's robe. Get my clothes. And he says, go and get the ring. What's the ring? It's the family ring, the signet ring, the family seal. Go and get my ring, the ring of the name of the family.

[50 : 53] And he says, and go and get shoes for his feet. Because Ezekiel prophesies that one day the father will put shoes upon our bare feet. And he says, go and kill the fattened calf.

Now, this is the most expensive animal on the property. And he throws a grand feast for him, a lavish party. And he celebrates with him. Friends, what do you learn?

No matter what you have done. No matter what you have not done for the Lord, perhaps. No matter what you thought about.

No matter what you failed to be. No matter what you have done or failed to do in this life. No matter how much shame you come today bearing for past sins.

Secret sins and misdeeds dark of the present right now. Or very public sins. That others know about. No matter what you have done. No matter how much you have run. No matter how much you've hated God.

[51 : 51] No matter how many scandals you've brought into this world and this culture. The real God, God the Father, is a God of mercy. Who wants to welcome you home today. And he wants to put his robe, his clothing upon your back.

And he wants to put his family name upon you. And he wants to throw a feast for you. He loves you. And he wants you to come home. No matter what. And the second thing you learn here. Is no matter how big that debt is that you've curated and created in your life.

No matter how big it is. You cannot work it off. You cannot come to God today and say. Well if I'm a good person. If I'm a religious person. If I obey for this many years.

Maybe you will accept me. And God wants to stop you right there. And say status as a son. Status as a daughter. Is not achieved.

It's only received. It's a gift from top to bottom. And the Lord today is saying. Prodigal sons and daughters. No matter where you are right now. Secret sins and misdeeds dark.

[52 : 50] Or public scandal. Come home. And he will kill the fattened calf for you. And he will throw a feast for you. Let me ask you. Ask it to you like this. Do you think that God the Father.

Sent his only begotten son. To die on the cross for you. So that he could look at you. For the rest of your life. With a frowny face. With a frown. Angry. Disappointed.

No. God the Father sent his only begotten son. So that. Because. And. Today. He looks at you with a smile. And he wants you to come home. Now.

The story would end really well right there. And we could say. Let us pray. But we can't. Because this is not primarily directed. At prodigal sons and daughters. This is primarily directed. At elder brothers and sisters.

And so the story. Goes to act two. In the main audience. Is the Pharisees. And boy. You know. They would not be moved by this moment. They would be angry. They would be so angry.

[53 : 49] They're probably shaking in their boots. At rage. At the fact that this father has done this. For this boy that doesn't deserve it. Grace. They hated grace. And. Here we come then.

To the elder brother scandal. And in verse 28. Just very briefly. This elder brother. Also now. In his anger. Causes a scandal. Too. A public shame. First.

In verse 28. He calls his father. Out of the party. From the feast. Because he won't come in. And this is an. This is an embarrassment. In the first century. To do something like this. To call the patriarch out.

Because. The younger brother. The elder brother. I should say. Won't come in. And so when he comes out. He says. Son. Why are you so angry? Now here's why he's so angry. Because the elder brother.

Is a son of the father. Obedient to the father. A good boy. We might say. Religious. Religiously devoted to the father. Why? Only because he wants benefits. And so.

[54 : 47] Now. That his younger brother. Has come home. And his younger brother. Has been received. What will happen? Now he will lose. 22% more. Of the inheritance. Than what he would have.

Originally lost. Now look. It's 22%. I know you're thinking. No. It's 33. One third. Right? But I had help on this. Okay. The maths work out. He took 33% away.

The first time. And now that he's come back. That means a total loss. Of 22% more than expected. And then. Down in verse 28. Look. The father. Begs. Entreats.

It says. He begs his older. His eldest son. Come. You too. Come into the party. Come and feast with us. Your brother was dead. And he's been found. He was lost. Come.

Come and eat with us. And dine with us. All of us together. One family. At the table of the father. Knees under the table of the father. And he won't do it. And it's because he says.

[55 : 41] I have worked so hard for you. And you see. He thinks that the relationship is transactional. He thinks that. If I'm going to really be a son.

Of the father. I have to earn it. And anybody around me. Who is not a good person. Who is not religiously devoted. Like I am. Has not earned it. He thinks.

Of the relationship. He has with God. With the father. As a transaction. And what does the father say? The father is saying to him. Just come. In other words. He's saying. Look. Don't worry about the stuff.

Who cares about stuff? Who cares about material? Who cares about an inheritance? Who cares about the land? He's saying. I will give you the land. Don't you know. That you will inherit the kingdom?

He's saying. Don't you see. Elder brother. It's not about your public respectability. And your decency. And your religious fervor. I want you. I want to know you.

[56 : 36] I want your heart. I want you to come to me. And I want to be your dad. I want to be your father. And I want you to be my son. And I want that to be your brother. And these are your sisters. And I want to sit around the table. And celebrate. And the elder brother can do nothing but in verse 30 say.

That son of yours. Not my brother. He has not earned it. He is not religious enough. Now look. This man.

Elder brothers and sisters. We are all prone. To one of the two ditches. Religion or irreligion. Elder brother and sisterhood. Or prodigal son and daughter.

Religion or irreligion. We are all prone to jump off the ditch. I should say. The road. Of the gospel. To either religion or irreligion. You see. And if you come today.

And you say. In the bottom of my soul. Sometimes I do struggle with looking around and saying. Sure. I have made some mistakes. But I am a good person. And I am very religious. And I really really struggle.

[57 : 38] When I know prodigal sons and daughters. In this world. In this church. And in the local community. That have come home. And been accepted. And celebrated. And partied over. And it almost hurts me. Because I have earned it.

And I have been here. And I have been an upright citizen. And I have been a respectable person. And what is Jesus saying? In his genius. He is saying. You can be prodigal. By your outward behavior. You can be a bad person.

Quote unquote. Prodigal by your outward behavior. A very public sinner. Yes you can. And he is saying. But you can be prodigal. By your inward behavior. As well. You can hide from the Lord. In misdeeds. That are very public. You can hide from the Lord. By doing lots of good things. And never confessing your need. To come home to the Father.

And be lavished in his mercy. In his grace. There is a beautiful. Wonderful book. By a southern. Writer in the U.S. That I really like.

[58 : 31] Named Flannery O'Connor. And she wrote a book. Called Wise Blood. And in it. The main character. Is a guy by the name of Hazel Motes. Hazel was a very religious man.

And one of the things. She writes about him. She said. She describes Hazel like this. There was a deep. Black. Wordless conviction in him. That the best way to avoid Jesus.

Was to avoid sin. If nobody ever comes and says to you. You have a need. If you're just presented as a good person. And one writer puts it this way.

A person can easily avoid the Savior. By being good. Salvation by morality. If like the elder brother. You believe that God ought to help you. And bless you. Because you have worked so hard. To obey him.

And be a good person. And Jesus may be your helper. He may be your inspiration. He may be your example. But he is not yet your Savior. Now. The ending.

[59 : 29] Verse 31. 32 I should say. Is left undone. So as we come. As we draw to a close. The ending here is left undone. We don't know what the elder brother did. It just stops.

He just says. Son. Come and celebrate. Your brother was lost. He's been found. And I want you too. To come to the table. And I think the reason that Jesus leaves it unanswered. Is why. Because the Pharisees and the tax.

The Pharisees and the scribes. Are standing right in front of him. And for every single one of us. Prodigal son or daughter. Elder brother or sister. He leaves it open. And he's saying to all of us today.

Will you come to the feast? Will you come and be lavished by God's grace and tenderness? Will you come to the father. Who gets down on his knee. And says.

If you will come and say I'm unworthy. And put your teary eyes into his shoulder. He will kill the fattened calf for you. Now thirdly and finally. Very brief.

[60 : 26] The whole story of grace. Since the 19th century. Some commentators. Historical critical scholars of the Bible. Have come to this passage.

And they have said things like. When you read the prodigal son story. All you see is a God who forgives freely. You see God who simply says.

Look. If you'll just say. I want forgiveness. He'll give it. Yeah. But what you don't see. That the commentators will say. Is you don't see a cross. You don't see justice. You don't see substitution. You don't see atonement. You don't see the fact that. God's lavish mercy. Depends upon the meeting place of mercy and justice. And so they've come. And they've said.

And many denominations have been driven by this logic. God forgives everyone. And there's no need for crucifixion. There's no need for a cross at all. Some have come and read it like this.

[61 : 20] But look. Here's what. Here's what's missing. In that reading. What's missing is sometimes to read the Bible really well. You've got to ask questions like. What is not here? What's missing here?

And think about it. There's a hint. In verse 13. It says that the prodigal son left his father's home for the far country. The far country in the Old Testament is this concept of exile.

It's being far away from the Lord. It's being distant from the Lord. Just think about it. Parable one. The lost sheep. Scribes and Pharisees. Who among you would not go and rescue the one sheep

that's lost?

Who among you would not go into the far country into exile and bring the one sheep back? Parable number two. The lost coin. Who among you would not go into the far country at the bottom of your couch and rip your house upside down to find the one coin that you've lost and bring it home again and throw a party?

Parable three. Now he doesn't say that explicitly, but it's implicit. Who among you, elder brothers of the land and first century, would not go into the far country and bring your little brother home?

[62 : 34] You see? That's the question that's not written, but it's implicit. And you see what he's saying? He's saying, what do we need? What do you need?

He's saying, do you not need a better elder brother than the one we read about right here? What if there was an elder brother who was willing to go into the far country?

What if there was an elder brother who was willing to step out of his father's home? What if there was one so free, so infinite, his grace, who would leave his heavenly home and go into the far country to bring his little brothers and his little sisters home again?

What if there was one who would go so far as to go into the pigsty itself and to become unclean so that you might be clean? To get so dirty in the muck of the pigs that the father would put his royal robe upon you?

And friends, we have that elder brother. Hebrews 11, sorry, Hebrews 2, verse 11 says, Jesus Christ is not and was not ashamed to call you brother and sister.

[63 : 49] You have that elder brother. He became unclean so you might become clean. He left his father's home above so free his grace to lavish you with his love, to go all the way to the point of bleeding for Adam's helpless race so that he could bring you home, whether you're a prodigal son and daughter publicly or whether you're an elder brother or sister privately, running away, alienated from the Lord.

He came for both. He came for both. And he wants to bring you home. Jesus Christ has pursued you. And he wants to bring you home with the father.

And he wants to put a robe on your back and shoes on your feet. And he wants to throw a feast for you. Will you come home? Let us pray. Father, we ask now that you would teach us grace, that you lavish forgiveness for sinners.

And we thank you, Lord Jesus, that you are the true and better elder brother, far better than any scribe, far better than any Pharisee, far better than any minister. You are the brother who came and went to death for us so that we might be made clean.

So we ask, Lord, that we would know something in our hearts of being robed in a robe of righteousness, not the robe of our sin. So I pray today, Lord, that you would touch many hearts and that you would cause us to say, I am unworthy, and yet lift up our heads and realize we truly have been lavished with forgiveness and a feast.

[65 : 20] So we pray that, and we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Let us sing together. As we close, we're going to sing about exactly this story. Grace that leads the sinner home is the hymn.

So your grace that leads the sinner home from death to life forever. Let's sing together. Amen. By blood and not by merit Your grace that reaches far and wide To every tribe and nation Has called my heart to enter in

The joy of your salvation By grace I am redeemed By grace I am restored And now I freely walk into The arms of Christ my Lord The grace that I cannot explain Not by my earthly wisdom The prince of life without a stain Was traded for this sinner By grace I am redeemed By grace I am restored And now I freely walk into The arms of Christ my Lord Praise rise up and overflow My song resumed forever For grace to see thee welcomed home To walk beside my Saviour By grace I am redeemed By grace I am restored And now I freely walk into The arms of Christ my Lord Grace, mercy, and peace to you

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit Amen Amen