

“Unquenchable Love” // Luke 15:11–32 //

I get to start with good news again: 3,218 total commitments to being a disciple; what they didn't tell you: over 300 of those were first time decisions!

And like you heard from your campus pastor, there's still time for you to make that commitment if you haven't yet. Just go to summitchurch.com today (or text “commit” to 33933 right now) and you can still do it. You say, “Why is this even important?” It's important from time to time to take stock and renew your priorities, and this one most of all. So, **if you're all-in-with-Jesus and not ashamed to admit it**, make this commitment. Now, if you're unclear about whether you're all-in or not, or what you want, by all means don't do it. **But we want everybody who considers themselves a part of this church** who is serious about following Jesus to do this-- whether you've been a Christian for 15 minutes or 15 years. **As we emerge from lockdown, it's a good way to reset and recalibrate.**

Luke 15, if you have your Bibles. One of Christian history's most famous paintings is Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal Son*, **pictured here**. What many don't know is that this was actually Rembrandt's second painting of the Prodigal Son; the first he did in 1637 when he was only 30 years old. In that version, Rembrandt places the Prodigal Son in a brothel--the colors are bright; he's got this elated look on his face, a drink in one hand and a beautiful woman on his lap. And, if you look close, you can see Rembrandt painted his own face as the face of the Prodigal.

Works consulted:

“The Meaning of Life: The Prodigal Son,” Greg Laurie

“Two Very Different Sons” (Luke 17:11–32), Tony Merida

“A Dad and Two Lost Sons” (Luke 17:11–32), Bryan Loritts

“Prodigal Sons,” Tim Keller

In this **second version**, which Rembrandt painted at the very end of his life (this was, in fact, his last painting, his final declaration to the world), it's clear that his view of the story had changed. The **mood of this version** is fundamentally different. In this one, everything is dark, the colors are muted, and you can feel the brokenness of the prodigal, and the light in the picture directs you to the overwhelming compassion of the father. In the first painting, the focus was on the prodigal; in the second, the focus is on the father.

Most interesting to me is the fact that in this second painting Rembrandt doesn't put his face on the returning prodigal, and biographers say that was intentional. Rembrandt doesn't want us looking at the painting and saying, “*Oh, look, there's Rembrandt.*” He wants us to **see ourselves in the story**, and he wants to think about God's love for us.

This story, you see, is the biography of every single person in human history put into a parable. It's the **story of our relationship** with God.

Again, Luke 15, beginning in **vs. 11**. This story has **3 main characters**: a younger son (he's the one we typically call ‘**the prodigal**’); an older son—who has a very important role in the story we sometimes overlook; and, then, the father.

A couple of things people usually get wrong about this story. **First, they think the main character is the runaway son.** But the main character, a Rembrandt realized, is the father. The father is mentioned no less than **12x** in a span of **20 verses**.

Second, they think that the word “prodigal” means “runaway.” It doesn’t; prodigal an old-fashioned word meaning “reckless” or “wasteful.” The prodigal spends and spends until he has nothing left. The word appears only one time in the story as a reference to the son blowing all his money.

I’m going to show that when you see the bigger point in the story, you realize the word prodigal applies just as much to the father as it does the son, because the story is about the recklessness of God’s love.¹ **As extravagant as is the younger son’s spending;** the extravagance of **the father’s love** is even more.

11 “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.’”

- In this story, **Jesus gives us a picture of the anatomy sin.**² Sin has 3 distinctive elements:
 - The first is **a desire for independence.** The son doesn’t want to be in the father’s house, under the father’s guidance. For years I’ve explained to my kids that the essence of sin is revealed by how you spell the world. The middle letter of the word is “I.” S-I-N. Sin is when “I” want to be in the center. “I want to be in charge, not God; I want to make the rules. My way. My desires. My glory.” This boy thinks. “My ways are better. I’m the wisest.”
 - **The second element** of sin is a **demand for instant gratification:** The son doesn’t want to wait for his inheritance. He wants it now. Quite often, people get tangled up in sin because they can’t wait for God’s timing. I’ve got to have it all right now or I can’t be happy.

¹ Throughout this message I draw upon many years of hearing this story taught, but the focus on the love of God I owe to a message given by David Jeremiah at the Pastor’s Conference, 1st Baptist Jacksonville, FL, 2013.

The **writer of Hebrews identifies this as the reason** many people forfeit eternity in heaven. He **uses the story of Esau to illustrate:** Esau, the firstborn soon of Isaac, came in one day from hunting and he was powerful hungry, so his conniving younger brother, Jacob, offered to give him a bowl of porridge if Esau would yield to him the rights and privileges of the firstborn. It was **a stupid trade;** it would be like trading your entire retirement portfolio for a cold beer, but in an incredible act of insanity, Esau does it. And the writer of Hebrews uses this to illustrate what many people do with their eternity, particularly with sexual immorality. They **sacrifice the eternal on the altar of the temporal;** giving away eternal life and happiness with God for a temporary thrill that doesn’t last long and doesn’t really satisfy.

- **The 3rd element, and most serious element of sin: A desire for the father dead.** The father is an obstacle to the boy’s freedom. It’s not that he hates his dad as a man; it’s just that his dad represents an obstacle to doing things his way and so he wants so he wants him gone. He wants his dad’s stuff, but doesn’t want his dad.

There are few things more painful that a parent could experience, but every parent knows that there comes a point when it is useless to try to force an adult child to do something they don’t want to do. And so, **12** And he divided his property between them. Which **leads to our 1st point:**

² Bryan Loritts, “A Dad and Two Lost Sons, Part 1” sermon preached at Abundant Life Christian Fellowship on June 12, 2016.

1. God loves you when you break his heart

- The shock of this story to the Jewish audience is that this father does not respond how Jewish fathers in that day were expected to respond. In **Deut 21**, in fact, the Law said that a boy that did such a thing should be stoned to death.³ This kind of rejection--this kind of pride and ungratefulness and rebellion, was worthy of death. Even in situations where they didn't carry through with the sentence, the Jewish community performed a ceremony called a *kezazah* in which they declared the rebellious boy dead to them.
- But this **father didn't respond that way**. He let his son go. Instead of pursuing him in anger, he opened up his hands and gave his son the inheritance--literally, in Greek, his *bios*, his very life. This was more than giving a little money; he let the boy go; even though it tore his very soul.

13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless (there's your word 'prodigal') living.

14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. **16** And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

2. God loves you as you wander in the darkness

This young prodigal's new life started out swimmingly. Sin always does. He's in the far country—away from the father, away from any restrictions—where he enjoys everything that money can buy. Sin always starts out this way; it's parties and freedom and excitement.

But then the winds changed, which they always do. The money ran out. The friends left. Then came the brokenness. The loneliness. And now this young man, who had grown up in privilege and promise, was reduced to begging. His new life ends with him taking the lowest job in all of Israel—feeding pigs. Pigs were unclean, defiled--and there we find this boy, sitting in the pen with the pigs; dirty, defiled, hungry--to hungry he's sharing food with the pigs--wondering how in the world he got there.

Hey, maybe **you are there this weekend**.

- **Maybe sexual sin has led you to a series of relationships where you can barely look at yourself any more.**
- Maybe it's a pornography addiction that's gotten out of control. Or alcoholism or drugs.
- Maybe **you've lost your job**. Your family. You're in debt. Maybe you're listening to me right now from prison.

The path you chose promised so much but it hasn't led where it promised. The pleasures of sin are real but they last only for a season.

- **Eminem** (*who I typically don't quote during sermons*) acknowledged, "You have to be careful what you wish for. *I always wished for this but it has become more of a nightmare than a dream.*"
- Or take **Billie Eilish**. She had the #1 album in 2019 at only 18 years old, but said recently in an interview that "Fame is trash." Why? Because the more famous she got the less she enjoyed her life.
- **The Bieber** explained recently: "I (had) a lot of money, clothes, cars, accolades, achievements, awards and I was still unfulfilled." He wrote a song called "Lonely" that explains his journey.

³ Cf. Ex 20:7.

Maybe that's where you are this weekend. You're in the far country. Here's the good news: **God loves you as you wander in the darkness. He's never stopped loving you.**

You **should almost read this story in split screen.** On one side of the screen is the son in his reckless living. But on the other is the **father who has never looked away.** The son doesn't realize it, but at that very moment the father is looking in his direction; loving him; thinking about him.

Many people assume that God loves them only when they've returned home and cleaned up their lives. **Quite the contrary:** God loved us while we were still sinners; while we were wandering in the far country.

I've got good news: your sin didn't cancel God's love for you. **We live in a 'cancel culture.'** You offend me, I cancel you. Sin did not cancel God's love for you! Right now he's looking for you; longing for you to come home.

In Hosea 11 we read: **7 My people are bent on turning from me... 8 How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I turn you over, oh Israel?**

When you were doing evil, God says, and not just doing evil but *bent* on doing evil (we couldn't stop; we were addicted to it.) It was then God cried out, *"How can I give you up?"*

In the miracle of miracles, our sin didn't cancel God's love for us. It's almost as if it made him love us more.

He loves you while you wander in darkness.

3. God loves you as he brings you back

17 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! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" **20** And he arose and came to his father.

One thing you may not notice in this story--it looks in this story like the son up and decides to come home on his own. But that's not true. You see, this is the **3rd of 3 stories** in which Jesus talks about God's love for sinners:

- **The first is about a lost sheep.** A shepherd, he said, had 100 sheep, and one went missing. The shepherd couldn't just cut his losses and rejoice in the 99; he had to go after the one.
 - **I read a business book** recently that explained that we tend to focus too much on business we lose, not realizing that it would be more profitable to focus on developing what we have left than trying to go back for what we lost. And **I suppose that's usually good business advice. But that doesn't work when you love the thing that you lost.** You have to find it. You can't be happy when it's lost. And that's how God feels about you. Like the shepherd, he's out looking for you, calling to you.
- **The second story is about a lost coin:** a woman has 10 coins, and she loses one somewhere in her house. Similar to the previous story, she doesn't just rejoice in the 9; she pulls apart the house piece by piece until she finds the lost one.
 - **You know that feeling when you lose your credit card?** You're not content with the other 6 you have in your wallet. You have to find the 1 that is lost.
 - **The climax of Jesus' trilogy** is this story about the lost son. The nature of love is that it doesn't stop; it doesn't give up.
 - **Several years ago, Rick Langston,** one of our lead pastors, had a younger son who disappeared one day. Nobody knew where he was. He'd been having a tough time in school and not getting along at home, but then one day he was just gone. His parents frantically called around, but no one had any idea

where he was. Rick remembered him talking about wanting to run away to NYC, so he and another one of our pastors, David Thompson, jumped into a car and drove all night up to NYC. But, you know, of course, NYC is a big place, so they stopped, prayed, and split up. David headed over to Times Square and went into the McDonald's there and there sat Michael. He called Rick and said simply, "I found him. I found him." Rick said, "I had never heard 3 sweeter words in all my life." I found him. (BTW, Mike is now married and he and his wife Meaghan now belong to our downtown campus and serve as foster parents)

- **This is the desperation that God feels for you when you are lost. He can't be happy until he finds you.**
- Again, you **don't see it illustrated** as much in this final story, but he's **seeking you just like the Shepherd goes out looking** for the sheep or the woman looks for the coin.
- He **puts things into your life to wake you up**; to call out to you. Sometimes it is a memory you can't shake; or pain: A broken marriage or a failed career.
 - **I talked once with a professional athlete** who lived here in the area. He was one of the most promising young athletes around. Had just signed a multi-year, multi-million dollar contract with a professional team, but he and some buddies had hopped onto some motorcycles and gone out to have some fun. He had an accident and shattered his leg in multiple places beyond repair. His contract stipulated that if he rode a motorcycle his contract would be null and void. In the space of just a moment, he had lost everything. We were sitting at the Mad Hatter in Durham and he told me, through tears in his eyes, "As I lay there in the hospital room, all I could think is, 'Why would God do this to me?' and 'I can't believe I threw my entire career away for a few seconds on a motorcycle.' He confessed to me that he hadn't been walking with God, but

this accident had forced him back to church--which is when I had met him. So, in the middle of the Mad Hatter in Durham I looked at him and I said, "Hey, I don't mean to speak too boldly, but I don't think you should interpret this as God's anger at you, but his kindness. You said, "I can't believe I threw away my entire career for a few seconds on a motorcycle; what if God was waking you up before you threw away your entire eternity for a few seconds in the spotlight?" And I remember him sitting there saying, "I get it, now." I asked him if he wanted to give his life to Christ and he said, "Here?" I said, "Why not?" And explained how he could pray to receive Christ. I'll never forget he reached across the table and grabbed both my hands and started to pray, out loud, giving his heart to Christ. It was one of the most amazing events I've ever been a part of--not typical for that Mad Hatter crowd.

- **I know that for many of you that's exactly** what he's been doing. Maybe this weekend he's put you flat on your back, as we say, so that you'd finally be looking in the right direction.
- Listen: it is not an accident that you are here today. You may have **felt like it was a random invitation** from a friend; or your friend kept texting you this link and you were like, "Fine, just to keep this guy off my back, I'll check this thing out. Just once."
- C.S. Lewis in *The Horse and His Boy*, my favorite in *the Chronicles of Narnia* tells the story of a boy running away but throughout the journey he hears footsteps. An **occasional roar** in the distance. Lewis said he was putting into story form how he experienced God pursuing him. He said, "God was whispering to me in my pleasures, telling me there was something more. Or the desperate feeling I had in my pain."⁴
- Can't you see this happening? **He loves you as he draws you back.**

⁴ My paraphrase, from *The Problem of Pain*.

4. God loves you as he wraps you in his arms

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran...

A couple things here. **First, of all, that word compassion** is the Greek word “splagma.” I love the word. It means literally “from the bowels.” It’s *onomatopoeia* (where the word sounds like what it is. SPLASH.) It refers to an emotion that arises spontaneously from the gut.

Splagma. Hear it? Say it with me. SPLAGMA. If it doesn’t sound like you’re retching you’re not saying it right.

- The **compassion the Father feels comes from so deep inside of him that it is almost like a reflex.** It’s instinctive. Natural. This is not a calculated, “What’s the right thing to do” decision. This is what is **naturally in the father’s heart.**
- **All throughout the Gospels** we find the phrase, “And Jesus was moved with splagma/compassion.” “He was overcome with compassion and healed them and taught them.” It was the **most natural gut-reaction Jesus had** in the presence of sin and suffering. Remember the story of the woman who touched Jesus and he felt the power go out from him, almost like he wasn’t even in control of it? It was like a reflex.
- **Dane Ortlund: “His is a love that cannot be held back when he sees his people in pain.”**
- We saw this a few weeks ago in the story of Jesus’ healing of the man whom his friends lowered through a roof. Before they could even open their mouths, words of reassurance and healing came tumbling out. It’s his **natural instinct. He is love and kindness all the way through.**
- You say, “**Well, doesn’t God feel wrath over sin?**” Yes, but the point is, that’s not his first, instinctive emotion. His first, instinctive emotion is compassion.
- It’s what he feels for you for this weekend.

The second word to notice is the word “ran.”

- **Grown men in those days did not run. Even in our day** grown men don’t usually just run in public. If you see a grown man running through the mall, it’s either because he’s committed a crime or someone is trying to commit a crime against him! **That was especially true in those days:** Running was considered undignified. Furthermore, men of stature wore robes, and robes are not good for running. No one enters a marathon with a full, ankle-length robe. And to run, this man would have had to lift up the front of the robe and expose his knees, which was considered shameful.
- **But the father seems oblivious to all this.** He’s so overcome with compassion for his son that he’s forgotten everything else. The example I always like to use here is **Jimmy Valvano in 1983 when NC State** did the incredible and won the national championship after Lorenzo Charles caught an airball shot by Dereck Whittenburg and dunked it in at the buzzer. Then the buzzer goes off and Coach Valvano starts running around like a crazy person. **He looks insane. But he didn’t care.** What if you saw in that just a glimpse of the excitement God would feel if you came home.

...and (the father) embraced him and kissed him.

- He began to whisper in his ear assurances of his love. **My wife** wandered away from God during her high school years. She had when she went to college she was ready to leave her Christian faith behind when she was invited by a friend to go on a Christian ministry retreat. She said she’s not even sure why she went, she thinks she got tricked into going, invited to go with some friends to the beach and then found out at the last minute it was a Christian retreat. At the end of the one of the talks, the subject of which she cannot remember, the speaker asked the attendees to pair up and pray for one another. My wife had never met the girl who prayed for her, but she began to pray out exactly what was going on in her life. She verbalized, in prayer, Veronica’s fears, questions, and sins. She then prayed the love of God into her life.

Veronica said **she felt completely exposed**; she knew that God was confronting her, revealing her brokenness, and speaking his love into her ear. **She was completely undone.** God had demonstrated to her that he knew her every secret and loved her anyway.

- **If you stop right now, and listen, God is whispering that to you. Listen to him.** You're sitting there right now thinking, "This is me." Yes. He's speaking to you.

21 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.'

22 But the father said to his servants, BTW, did you notice that thi on never got through his prepared speech? He'd planned to tell his dad about his plan to become a servant to work off his debt, but his dad says, "Shut up," and **says to the servants:** 22-'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

5. God loves you as he baptizes you with grace and makes all things new

- He gives his **son 3 gifts**:
 - **A robe**—and not just a robe, but "the best" robe. Which, BTW, the "best" robe would have belonged to the father. That means the dad gave the son *his* own garment.
 - **A Ring**—this was a symbol of the family authority. He's immediately being restored to his status as a son.
 - **Sandals**—sandals were a sign of wealth. Servants didn't wear shoes in the house. Only sons did.
- **IOW, not only did the father withhold punishment, he bestowed gifts. It's the greatest word in the English language,** and what separates the Christian message from every other: GRACE. God

not only withholding from us the anger that we do deserve, but showering us with multiplied goodness that we don't deserve.

- **Where is the punishment?** There's no mention of it.
- **Who pays** for the Son's reckless living? There's no talk of that, either. BTW, the father had already given the son his full share, which means all these new gifts are coming out of his own stores. The Father absorbs the debt.
- **Where's the shame?** It's been removed. The only shame in the story is experienced when the Father lifts up his robe and runs to the boy.

This story gives us the smallest glimpse into how Jesus would save us in the cross.

You see, the cross was Jesus running after us, covering us in grace:

- **There, at the cross, Jesus would take upon himself our shame.** He was beaten, spat upon, mocked. The Romans crucified criminals in public places to humiliate them. People walked by Jesus and taunted, "Save yourself, miracle boy! Looks like God doesn't think of you as 'Beloved Son' now!"
- **There, at the cross, Jesus absorbed the cost of your sin.** Sin incurred a penalty. But just like the father in this story, Jesus did not require that payment from you. As the nails were driven into his hands and feet, he was absorbing that penalty into himself. He was being wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, paying the price so that we could be at peace with God. **All we like sheep...**

Interestingly, in that part of **Deuteronomy 21**, where it says that a rebellious son should be stoned, right after that it says, "Everyone who hangs on a tree will be considered cursed by God." It seems like a random insertion! But Moses was prophesying, some 1200 years before Jesus, that all we like this prodigal son would reject our Father, and Jesus would die hung up on a tree to suffer the

curse and shame we had incurred. He absorbed our curse and paid our penalty.

- **At the cross** is where Jesus took off the **garments of our sin** and clothed us in the **robe of his righteousness** out of his own closet.
- **The cross is where Jesus placed on our finger the ring of a new life**—to as many as received him, to them he gave the right, the authority, to be called the children of God, and that includes the authority to overcome sin and evil; the power to put your family back together and to escape the curse and addictions of sin.
- **The cross is where he put on our feet the sandals** of a privileged position with the Father so that we can come boldly **into his presence** like sons. At the cross, **God made him, who knew no sin**, to become sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord, grace that exceeds our guilt and our sin! Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured, there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt! If the cross had never happened, this whole parable would be just a **quaint story**. But when you read this story in the light of the cross, you see that God is the true prodigal—the one who spent himself recklessly and extravagantly. Who ran to you, embraced you and kissed and clothed you in power and grace.

(BTW, I'm going to show you this in a second, in Jewish culture it was the responsibility of the older son to go out after a wandering younger son. Jesus' question to the Pharisees is, "Why aren't you doing that?" Jesus, in coming to earth, plays the part of the older brother going out after the lost son, even taking the death penalty the younger son deserves.)

But the main point I want you to see in all of this is that **this whole story**, every step of it, **is bathed in the love of God**. God loved us when we rejected him; loved us as we wandered; loved us he brings us back; loved us as he baptizes us with grace.

Sometimes people talk about salvation as if it is a calculated theological transaction... It's not. It's God's heartbroken pursuit of you.

Which leads me to **two final, quick things** before we close:

6. God loves you when you're too proud to receive his grace

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **27** 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.'

28 *But he was angry and refused to go in.*

His father came out and entreated him, **29** but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

(I was reading this story to my family and said, "OK, so one person was NOT happy the son came back. Who was it?" And Adon my raised his hand and said "The fatted calf." And I said, "Yes, that's true. The fatted calf certainly had a bad day when the son returned. But I was thinking more of the older son. He was angry.")

31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. **32** It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'

This brother, on the surface, looks like the opposite of the younger son. He's the **good boy**. But there's a **subtle detail you don't want to**

overlook: he also is outside the house. The father has to come out to him, also!

He actually has **a lot in common with the younger brother**. Both want the father's things but neither really wants the father. This older brother doesn't want to be with his dad either. He resents his father's grace and has no desire to be like him.

Who is Jesus directing this to? Well, the occasion for him telling all these stories is explained in vs. 2 of chapter 15. **"And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."(Luke 15:2).** This story is Jesus' response to that. The Pharisees don't understand God's love for broken people because they didn't see themselves as broken. But they are.

What Jesus is teaching is that **there are two ways you can stay separated from God**. You can run off to the far country, like the younger brother, and give yourself to sin. The other way is to stay **near the house of religion**, using rule-keeping to cover up the fact that you are not like God and don't really love him. In some ways the religious brother is worse! At least the younger brother knows he needs redemption. The pride of the older brother keeps him from seeing how broken he is. **He's a stranger living in the house.**

The Bible says, all of us, **religious or not**, rich or not, cultured are not, are hopelessly **broken on the inside**, and all our religious deeds can't change that. **Jesus said religion makes us like a white-washed tomb**. Clean and polished on the outside; full of dead men's bones on the inside.

The more you try to clean yourselves up through religion instead of God's grace, the worse you make things!

- My 2nd daughter, when she was 4, disappeared to the bathroom for a long time. Our friend Stacy, who was babysitting, got a little

worried, and went over to the bathroom door, put her ear next to it, and heard crying. She said she opened the door and almost gagged; because there is Allie. standing there, beside the toilet, with (and I'm sorry if this is gross) poop EVERYWHERE. On her arms. On the sink. On her face. Stacy said, "I don't understand how poop got on her face?!" And Allie ws crying saying, "I tried to clean myself up!" (Self-defecating humor). That's what religion is. Everything you do in religion has the stench of death.

(MUSIC)

What you need is a change of heart. And I've got good news for you religious people. God loves you also and wants to give it to you. You see, **this story is an invitation.**

Did you notice that this story never resolves? It cuts off abruptly in verse 32. And you're left asking, *What does the older brother decide?* Does he receive his father's invitation to come in, or does he stay outside of the house?

You don't know, because the story is an invitation to older brothers-telling them, the grace of God is for you, too. He loves you even when you are too proud to receive his grace, and he stands ready to receive you when you're humble enough to admit you need him.

Cast off your idolatrous and ridiculous pride and confess that you are just as broken and needy as the prodigal in the far country and receive his grace for you. When you do, it will make you a different person.

And that leads me to our last point:

7. You can choose to stay outside of God's love

- Like I said, the story never resolves. Because you can stay outside of God's house. Yes, God's love is overflowing and never-ending, but he won't force it on you. **You can stay outside of the house.**
- And if you choose to spurn his love, God has no choice but to bring his judgment on you. Remember this verse from last week?

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, "When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire... (he will) inflict vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord."

If you won't receive God's grace, you will suffer the worst kind of eternal judgment.

But I'm here to tell you that's not what he wants. **Lam 3:33**, "For he does not **afflict from his heart** or grieve the children of men."

Wrath and affliction don't come from his heart. What he wants, from his heart, is to save you! To bring you home and wrap you in his arms and pour out mercy on you. But you have to choose that; he won't force it on you. The **most important question** about your life is simply this: **Will you come back to the Father and receive that mercy?**

We want to see that happen to you today if it never has. Have you ever received Jesus? PRAY THIS. **TEXT READY TO 33933**

SUMMIT, who in your life needs to hear this message? Who do you need to run after? Like Jesus explained, those who understand the grace they have received are anxious to see it extended to others.

One of two things is true. Either God is drawing you in or he is propelling you out...

Who in your life has God put on your heart? **We ask a question around here: "Who's Your One?" One person you... Who's YOUR one?** Why not pray for them now. And maybe pray about asking them to listen to this and then discussing with you.

