

It's a Party

By John Maiden, Associate Pastor

January 7, 2018

Luke 15:11-32

Good morning Perry Creek. My name is John Maiden, and I am on staff here at the Church at Perry Creek. What a great morning to be in God's Word together.

This morning we are starting a new four part sermon series called "You're Invited." One of our main priorities in 2018 is going to be challenging each other to take the next step and invite other to people to our church. We do a great job of serving as a church. We want to get better at serving and also inviting. Inviting them to Perry Creek and, ultimately, inviting them to a relationship with Jesus, if they don't have one. This series is going to involve both God's invitation to us as well as the invitation we should give to others. In ways, this series is going to be challenging as we are going to challenge you to invite. But I think it will be a wonderful and exciting month for us.

In this four part series, we are going to look at four different parables about invitation. Parables are stories Jesus told that give us spiritual truth. This morning we are going to look at one of my favorites, known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, found in Luke 15:11.

It was the summer of 2016 and John Duke was to be born in August. Sarah and I noticed how all these young couples were taking what they liked to call "babymoos," kind of like a honeymoon. You take one last trip together before you start having kids. So being the great husband that I am, I whisked her off to drive all the way to St. Louis, Missouri for the Southern Baptist Convention. Look I had to go there for a class, OK. While it was a lot of meetings, we also wanted to do a few fun things while we were there. We decided to go to a Cardinals baseball game. As we were standing in line, a man walked up to us and gave us some extra tickets he had. These were some nice seats. The ticket price was up around \$100. The seats were in a club level, in the shade, with an indoor concession stand. As hot as it was outside, this was amazing. For a seven month pregnant wife, it was an absolute God-send. Those tickets the man gave us that day were completely undeserved. All we were doing was standing there. He chose to give us an underserved invitation to the game, essentially as his guest.

Today we are going to look at one of the most famous parables Jesus ever told, which is about an undeserved invitation. I am sure that many, if not all, are familiar with what is known as "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." We might look at this popular story in a way that you never have before. Now the titles of chapters and sections in your Bible were not there originally and were placed there by man. Most titles I would say really get the theme of what is going on in the passage, but I think this one misses it a little bit. This story is not just about one son. It is about two sons. We have one younger son and one older son. So maybe the title should be something like "The Parable of Two Lost Sons." Because in their own way, both separate themselves from God. We are going to see that the gospel can change and penetrate both. It is a story of two rebellious sons and the loving grace of their father.

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 in 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 and 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 servants 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. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 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 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; 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.'

"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 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 15:11-32

When we look at God's word, whether it is in your personal study or as a church, one thing that helps us understand a passage is the look at its context. We need to know for one, the cultural

setting of the passage. In this passage, we ask ourselves “Who is Jesus talking to as he is giving this story?” It is important to know who Jesus’ audience is as he is giving this parable. This is the third parable of three parables, which we find in Luke 15:1-2, Jesus gives to the same audience.

“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’” So, Jesus told them a parable. Here we see that as Jesus is giving this parable he is addressing two groups of people. One is the “tax collectors and sinners” and the other is “the scribes and Pharisees.” This is important, because each of the people in our story represents someone in the audience:

- * Tax Collectors and Sinners = Younger Son

- * Scribes and Pharisees = Older Son

- * The Father = God

In God, we find true joy and satisfaction

The story from the beginning tells us the father had “two sons” - not just one. Then the story starts with a focus on the younger son.

The Request: The younger son comes to his father and asked him for a shocking request. The younger son comes to his father asking for his share of the inheritance. We are familiar with the idea that for someone to have received their inheritance, usually the person giving the inheritance had to die first. Clearly the Father was still alive, and even still, the son came to his Father and asked for his inheritance. Talk about an ultimate slap in the face - a request of amazing disrespect, love and disappreciation for his father. He was essentially saying that he wants nothing to do with his father and his family. In fact, he was essentially saying that he wished his father was dead. All he wanted was his money, and he was going to take it and leave.

Can you imagine what this would be like for your son or daughter to come up to you and go ahead and ask for their inheritance? Not only that they want to take it and move to another country and never see you again. Heartbreaking.

The father then graciously grants the son’s request. Again, let’s take the cultural setting into account. In the Middle East during this time, it was an intensely patriarchal society, where respect for elders, especially parents, was extremely important. A Middle Eastern father would be expected by Jesus’ audience to firmly discipline this son for such blatant disrespect and dishonor. But the father grants his son’s request. We have a choice to follow God or on sinful ways. Which will we choose?

After receiving his inheritance, the younger son gathered up all he owned and set out on a journey to a country far away. He didn’t stay close. He wanted nothing to do with his family. So, he takes his money, and off he goes to spend it on all the world has to offer. The Scripture says “Reckless Living.” We are not told exactly what he spent it on, but we can be sure he spent it on all the world had to offer. The younger son thinks this is the way to truly live! To take all you have and seek out all the pleasures this world can offer. Then you will be satisfied. Then you will be happy.

Remember that I mentioned that this story is about two different ways we can separate ourselves from God. Two ways that we can be rebellious against God. This seeking satisfaction in the things of this world is one of those ways. Remember, the younger son represents the sinners.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

- Romans 1:21-23

The younger son was doing just that. He was exchanging the things of God, the Father, for the things of this world. Trying his best to find his worth, identity, and satisfaction in the things of this world. Not in Christ. This is all of us without Christ, seeking the pleasures and things of this world. Before Christ we are dead in our sin and alive to the world. But even as believers, we can find ourselves sliding back into this lie, that it is the world that satisfies us.

It can be more obvious sins like alcohol, drugs, sex. While these are struggles for some, we also look for satisfaction in things that tend to be more hidden - lust/pornography, desire for money, earthly power or popularity. We seek for satisfaction in our relationships. How easy is it for us to seek ultimate satisfaction in those. I know when I was single, I in a way worshipped the idea of being married, thinking that was going to satisfy me. For those who are younger, it may be grades, sports or your hobbies.

The sin of the younger son can be seen when we worship, rest or find satisfaction in anything other than Jesus. When we seek after these things, we are saying to our Heavenly Father that we don't want Him. We want your gifts, not you. We would rather seek after what the world has for us, for we think that is better. The world and all it has to offer will satisfy me. This is what the younger brother did. Can you relate?

As we see in this story, sin's pleasures are fleeting. They do not satisfy. God and God alone can satisfy the greatest longings of our heart. The things of this world only lead to destruction and will NOT satisfy. God's invites us to so much more! God invites you to a complete and eternal joy!

In your presence in fullness of joy, at your right hand are pleasures forevermore!

- Psalm 16:11

The younger son ended up spending all he had and came to the lowest point of his life. He had no money. He hit rock bottom. He was hired as a pig feeder. This is as bad as it could possibly get. For a Jewish man, working with pigs was the most degrading job he could have. Rabbinic writings said that it was a curse for people to work with pigs. Also in the Old Testament book, Leviticus, we learn that pigs are unclean. Not only did he work with pigs, he was so hungry. He wanted to eat the pig's food! The younger brother is completely helpless.

When the younger son had reached rock bottom and was about to starve, Scripture says he "Came to his senses." He thought to himself about the well-being of the "Hired Men" that worked for his father. These men were hired on a day to day basis doing temporary jobs for his father. They were better off than him. His hope was that his father would take him back to be one of these people. This, to him, was the best-case scenario. He thought at the very least he would have to pay back the debt that he owed to his father. The was best case scenario. The Pharisees definitely thought this way. The believed that people had to earn their way back into the community. If you violated the community's standards, an apology would not do. To be reconciled, you had to prove it and work for it.

Who knew what awaited him when he returned? He had disgraced his own father as well as his community. Would he be completely rejected? Punished? Banned? Even though he did not know what awaited him, he decided that was better than being in this foreign land with nothing and starving to death. So, the younger son rehearses a confession speech to his father. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants." He saw that he had sinned. He had sinned against God, first and foremost, and he had sinned against his father. The younger brother saw his helpless state and became a repentant sinner. Repentance - turning from your Sin and coming to God - is a theme in the Old Testament and New Testament. "Repent and Believe"

Repentance is the only correct response for the sinner. As a sinner, we are to see our ourselves as so. Repentance is the sinners part in being restored to God. All who are a follower of Christ must come to the realization that they are a sinner and turn from that sin to God and His forgiveness. As Christians as we battle sin daily, we are called to live a lifestyle of repentance. Saying no to our sin and trusting God and his word. Just like the younger brother, we must repent of our sin and return to God.

In God, we find love, grace and mercy

So off goes the repentant son to his father. I can imagine as he set out to go home, he wondered what it would be like when he arrived. Scripture says that while the son was a long way off the father saw him. This gives us the impression that the father was watching, waiting, and longing for the wayward son to return. When the father saw him, the Bible says the father ran to meet the son. The Greek word here used to describe run is the word "trecho," which is the word used when someone is running in a race. This father was sprinting after his son. Middle Eastern men did not run. It was a sign of a lack of self-respect. But this father didn't care about any shame or embarrassment that came to him. His son was home! When the father reaches the son, he embraces him in all his dirtiness and filth and kissed him.

By embracing him like this, the Father was making it clear that the son was accepted back as his son! Despite anything the son had done, the father welcomed the son back! The son had nothing to give to the father. He had only brought shame to his father and his family. He had only sinned against his father. But the father still welcomed and embraced him.

The son then begins his rehearsed speech. The son did not even finish all of what he rehearsed. There was no need because the son had been fully accepted back. He did not have to pay back any debt at all! He was back in the family! The acceptance of the son is also seen in what the father asked of the servants. The father said:

'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."

- Luke 15:22-24

The best robe was to worn by the patriarch or special guest, and it was given to the son. The ring was the ring worn by the father and, by placing it on his son hands, he was giving his son authority. Putting sandals on his feet was also significant. Slaves did not usually have sandals, so by giving him sandals he was again signifying full sonship to his son. They killed the fattened calf, something was also reserved for special occasions and was efficient enough to feed the whole community. This was a community wide celebration!

What a beautiful picture of the party that is throw for every sinner who repents and comes to God! The gospel is centered on the love and grace of God. The Gospel is the good news of how God forgives sinners.

After the younger son had turned his back on his father, wished he was dead, and spent all of his inheritance, and has nothing left. He then goes back to his father. Put yourself in this son's shoes as he is returning home. He has no idea what his Father's reaction is going to be. According to Old Testament law in Deuteronomy 21, a rebellious son deserved death. He could have been disowned, he could have been beaten.

He thought that best case scenario he could work for his dad to repay his debt.

“And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”

- Luke 15:20

There is nothing this son brought - only pain, dishonor, disgrace, sorrow. He did not have to work off his debt. By grace, he was fully forgiven by the father. It is like the hymn says “Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to the cross I cling.”

This is the good news of the gospel. There is nothing that we bring to God. In our sin, we too have turned our back on God and said that we want nothing to do with Him. This is all of us before Christ.

You want to know some good news? God runs after us! It doesn't matter what you have done or will do. God longs for you to come to Him. He welcomes us in the same way that this younger son was welcomed. With a joyous party. Celebration. There is nothing we bring to God. But even still, God runs to us, and embraces you, and kisses you, and lavishes you with his gifts, and brings you into His family. We don't have to work off our debt to God. It has been paid for us in Jesus.

In God, we find rest from our work

Next let's turn our attention to the older son in this story. Often when you hear the story of what we know as "The Prodigal Son," the main - or sometimes only focus - is on the younger son. While that part of the story is wonderful and amazing, it is not the whole story. The story is about two sons. I would even say you might relate more to the older son than the younger son in our "Bible Belt" America.

The first time I really sat down and studied this story I was blown away and broken by the story of the older son. Why? Because I found a lot of myself in him. A lot of what has helped me prepare for this sermon is a book written by Tim Keller called "The Prodigal God." In this book, he focuses a lot on the rebellion of the older son and how he is rebellious to the Father just as much as the younger son is.

So, the party is taking place and the older son is out in the field when he hears what he is going on. He asks one of the servants what is happening, and he tells him that his brother has come back home and his father is throwing a party. This made the older son so mad. He is so mad, in fact, that he refused to even go to the party. So, the loving and gracious father comes out to the older son, just as he had the younger (again we see the love, grace and mercy of the father) and invited him to the party.

He is furious. He says to his dad, 'Look, (notice he does not even address him as his father) 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. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

He is furious. Should he be, though? Look the older son, we see, is a "good guy." "Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command."

It is important to stop and remind ourselves who the older son represents in this story. The older son represents the scribes and the Pharisees. The scribes were teachers of the law. So, let's just say they knew the Bible. Pharisees were a religious group that were known for strict obedience to the Word of God. They knew the law. They followed to the law. They were good people. But time and time again, Jesus points out how they were separate from God.

In not going in and celebrating the return of his brother, the older son is showing his true heart, his selfish, legalistic obedience to his father. Jesus is saying that if you are a follower of Him then you should rejoice when a sinner comes to Christ. The older son's anger shows his heart and lack of understanding of the grace of God. That it is by that grace alone that he didn't end up like his brother. It is by God's grace that we are not like the worst of sinners.

Think about what the older son would look like in our world today. They would know and read their Bible. They obey their Bible. They pray, go to church, maybe even go on mission trips.

These are obviously all good things! But just doing things these does not bring us into a right relationship with God. If we have learned anything from the younger son, it is not about what you do or bring to the table that matters! The older son thinks by his obedience he has earned something. He should be the one that has a party. The older son type of person lives in such a way that if you have a strict obedience to the bible and do what is right, then you will earn things. Then you will be accepted and worthy.

This is a very dangerous place to be. These people do not in fact, they do not think they need a savior. They think they are their own saviors. If I just do good, then I will be OK. What is also scary is the older son type of people are much harder to detect than the younger son.

The reason I mentioned that the older brother rocked my world when I first studied this story many years ago, was because well, I can see myself in the older son. I grew up in a Christian home. Whenever the doors of the church were open, I was there. I went to a Christian kindergarten, elementary and high school. I know the Bible. I even obey the Bible, for the most part. But that is not what makes me right with God! I am still just like the younger son who brings nothing to God. It is only by God's grace and Jesus' finished work on the cross. My acceptance is not based on anything I do or ever will do.

It is not by our works that we are accepted by God. There is nothing we can do to earn it! In Christ, we are free from such a task - a task of trying to earn your way to salvation. Every other main world religion says you have to earn your way to God. But not here. Jesus has done all the work. We don't have to work to earn favor with God. God accepts you as you are! We just have to put our trust in Jesus. The one who did the work for us on the cross.

We have learned in this story that in Jesus we can have true joy and satisfaction. We can have love, grace, and mercy given to us. We don't have to work for our salvation. These are all blessings for everyone in Christ.

The good news is we are all invited to come to Jesus! It doesn't not matter who you relate more to today. Whether you tend to be like the younger son and try to find satisfaction in the world or you tend to be like the older son and are living a religious, legalistic life. Or are you are like me and can find yourself sometimes in both camps? Jesus' invitation to come to him is for you.

But how can this be? Grace! The Gospel! Gospel means simply Good News - the news about what Jesus has done. Jesus has come! He has died for you! For me! All of us have turned our backs on God. We all deserve God's wrath because of this.

While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
- Romans 5:8

While we were being rebellious against God, He ran after us! He died for. We were like the younger son, saying give your gifts and I want nothing to do with you! Jesus took our wrath and bore all of it on the cross. There is no more for those in Jesus.

God made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him, we might become the righteousness of God.

- 2 Corinthians 5:21

We are invited to be set free from sin and alive to God as a part of his family! He welcomes us as a son and as a daughter.

This is love. This is the gospel. The good news of the gospel and us growing in the gospel does not stop at conversion. I believed this for so long. We grow as a Christian as we grow in truth, knowledge and reality of the gospel, and we learn to live in light of it. When the gospel is at the center of your life, we are free from seeking the pleasure of the things of this world. We are free from putting on a mask, living a legalistic lifestyle and seeking the approval of God and man. We are free from these burdens and set free to live for and with God. We get God! A relationship with God! In Him, we find the satisfaction that we long for in these other things.

*O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you;
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

*So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,
beholding your power and glory.
Because your steadfast love is better than life,
my lips will praise you.*

*So I will bless you as long as I live;
in your name I will lift up my hands.*

- Psalm 63

For me to live is Christ and to die is gain." "My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.

- Philippians 1:21

Stop settling for the things of this world or a religious lifestyle and accept Jesus' invitation to come to Him. Notice how this parable ends. It just ends suddenly:

"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 15:31-32

We are not told what the older son did. Did he accept the invitation of the father to come? Jesus stopped here purposefully. It is as if Jesus is saying to his audience will you accept my invitation to come? Well, will you? Will you, unbeliever? Will you, believer?