

Extravagant Grace

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[0 : 00] Good morning again. We'll look at Luke 15 this morning. Familiar passage, one of my favorites. You know, there's an awful lot wrong with our world that can make us lose our comfort and joy.

You know, what's the one thing that gives our Heavenly Father the greatest joy? What do you think? The one thing that makes Him the happiest, gives Him the greatest joy. Well, three times in Luke 15, we see the answer in verse 7. There'll be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

That's Jesus' parable of the lost sheep. And in verse 10, I tell you, there's more joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. That's the parable of the lost coin.

And we see in verse 23, So Luke records these three interrelated parables of Jesus.

[1 : 09] And the theme in all three of them is the gracious Father's joy over bringing sinners back into relationship with Him. One lost sheep, one lost coin, and one lost son.

Actually, two sons who needed intimacy with the Father restored. So let's read this familiar passage to us. And for context, we'll read the first couple of verses of Luke 15.

Then we'll pick up at verse 11. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

So He told them this parable. In verse 11, He 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 took a journey into a far country. And there he squandered his property in reckless living.

[2 : 10] And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields 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 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, 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.

[3 : 17] 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's received him back safe and sound. But he was angry and 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 fatted 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 the word of the Lord for us today.

[4 : 20] Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for joining us again into your presence because you love us and you have embraced us and you continue to embrace us as your children and honor us and kiss us.

And this is our comfort, as the psalmist says, in all kinds of sufferings that your promise gives us life. So we pray for more of that life-giving gospel message to our hearts today.

We take comfort in the story of the gospel and in the suffering that our Lord Jesus went through so that we might enjoy, we might have comfort and joy forever with no sin or no sadness.

So we ask you by your Holy Spirit to move in our hearts and our minds and our church. For Christ's sake, we pray. Amen. And you can be seated.

Amen. So I hope you had some time over the holiday to list the blessings of God that you're especially thankful for.

[5 : 33] We had a great one-hour service on Thanksgiving Day here with encouraging testimonies about God's goodness to us. We could have gone on for a couple of hours, I think.

It was really a blessing. There were testimonies of real difficulty and pain and trouble that God has allowed into our lives. But each person expressed faith in God's promises, in His providence, His good providence of blessing, even in the midst of suffering loss.

And one of the things I remember Javier sharing was a reminder that the gospel is not good advice to try to follow, but it's good news to believe by faith.

He reminded us that, you know, we go to experts for good advice so that we can do something with that advice. But we go to the gospel for good news, to rejoice in what's already been done.

We rejoice in the fact that Jesus has already accomplished the work for us, and we don't have to strive to be accepted by God, to be loved by Him.

[6 : 42] I love this parable the most because it so clearly takes us to the good news of what someone has already done, that our inheritance is guaranteed, as the gracious Father says to his older son in treating him and trying to bring him back into intimate relationship with him in the home.

He says, all that belongs to the Father is yours. And that's what God says to us, right? All that belongs to the Father, all that belongs to Christ is yours already because of what He has accomplished, because He said it's finished.

In good times or in bad, the thing that you and I need the most is the good news of our Father's loving embrace. If we're in Christ, this parable really is a picture of what the Heavenly Father has done to embrace you, to honor you and kiss you and to declare that you are not a slave, you're not a servant, you are a son or a daughter, and the Father delights in our repentance.

He delights in our coming with a broken and a contrite heart. The Father in Jesus' parable was just as concerned with the spiritual health of the older son as he was with the younger prodigal son, because he wanted much more than just outward conformity.

We refer to this as the parable of the prodigal son, but Jesus starts out, there was a man who had two sons. So it's just as much about Jesus trying to communicate something of the difference between where these two sons were, what was going on in their hearts.

[8 : 18] In David's personal confession of adultery and murder in Psalm 51, you remember he speaks to the kind of heart level response that God desires for us. He says, you desire truth in the inward being.

You teach me wisdom in the secret heart. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. And he says the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart. O God, you will not despise. In fact, he's not just not despised, but he takes great delight. He takes great joy when one sinner repents. The repentance, the response that God delights in is one from a humble, broken heart over your sin and your remaining corruption.

The conflict for the Pharisees and the scribes, they were offended by Jesus because he was mixing and mingling with sinners. He was eating with them. But their problem was what was on the inside, that they were spiritually unhealthy.

They thought Jesus was unhealthy, but spiritually they were unhealthy because they didn't understand what Jesus had come to do. Instead of having contrite hearts, their hearts were filled

with pride.

[9 : 37] And the danger of pride is it will always lead us to be concerned with surface things, right? Overlook the deeper examination of our hearts. Our pride leads us to create idols, substitute saviors.

John Calvin talks about the heart as a factory that continually produces idols. So each one of us, our hearts have the ability to create a new one every day that surprises you.

You know, you didn't know you could worship that idol. Ken Sandy and other writers, they point out the typical progression of an idol that we're often tempted to substitute in place of God.

So it starts with, I desire something. Sometimes it's a good thing that I desire. That moves to I demand, moves on to I judge, and then I punish.

So the progression of an idol. I desire, I demand, I judge, I punish. And you can follow the progression with the religious leaders who scorned Jesus because the Pharisees and the scribes, they had expectations of a teacher, what a good teacher was supposed to be like.

[10 : 48] And they desired a teacher that was more like them. They demanded that he meet their expectations. And in their disappointment, they judged him, their jealousy.

And ultimately, what did they do? They conspired to punish him, to kill him, to take his life, to destroy him. I think we see the same progression of an idol in cancel culture today.

Someone desires something, can be a good thing, but the sign that it's become a substitute deity is when the desire becomes a demand. I demand, I judge, and ultimately, I cancel.

Or I punish you. You know, we know there's only one person in the universe who has the righteous authority to cancel someone. He's the only one who has every right to demand worship from every creature.

He's the only one with the rightful authority to judge men and women and ultimately to bring just punishment to those who reject his mercy. Right? The only one who can condemn, who can, who has the righteous authority.

[12 : 00] His self-exaltation is the highest virtue, as John Piper likes to put it, because he knows there's nothing more life-giving, there's nothing more rewarding, there's nothing that brings more comfort and joy than your worship of him alone.

So it's right for him to say, worship me and none other. the problem for fallen humans is that our hearts deceive us into chasing after all kinds of substitutes that try to function like a savior.

The younger brother, he was chasing those substitutes. The older brother, he had some substitutes as well. We remember what the prophet Jeremiah says in 17, chapter 17, verse 9.

He says, the heart is deceitful and beyond all cure. Can anyone fully grasp, he asked the question, can anyone fully grasp the underlying motives of his own heart?

I have a new friend who is currently incarcerated at the Walker State Prison and I meet with him on the first and third Monday evenings. Dana Amborski and I travel together down to the prison and just across the border in Georgia and there's about 13 or 14 of us in two teams that meet with inmates around tables in a cafeteria area of the prison and my friend and I have met over the last couple of months and we're getting to know each other better.

[13 : 27] I've come to see that he has a lot of zeal but he hasn't been exposed that much to the truth of the gospel so he struggles with the truth that we're sinners and saints simultaneously that we still live in this tension of those two realities of being a sinner and a saint without hypocrisy but with faith and he's read some things and has been led to believe that you have to be either one or the other you can't be both and this past Monday we spent some time together looking at scripture and I showed him this statement in Jeremiah you know the heart is deceitful and beyond all cure and I asked him whose heart is that talking about you know who's Jeremiah referring to and he admits that he still falls short of God's commands he sort of lived the way of the younger brother in his life and it's resulted in a long prison sentence but unfortunately he's trying to live the life of the older brother now you know he's trying to please God through his good works and through his efforts pray for me and for Dana and for all these other men and pray for more men who want to mentor some of these men who have asked for mentoring you know pray that I can communicate well the fact that

God provides in the gospel everything that he requires in the law pray that he'll come to see that God is most concerned with the spiritual health with the inward being and the brokenness and the humility that we should have at the heart level first which itself will result in change in behavior in

outward performance when we understand the problem we have with our own heart then we'll be better equipped to help another person with their heart and our sin is so much more than surface behavior right it's rooted in our hearts our will our attitudes our desires our motivations as well as our actions and James applies this truth to conflicts that we often get into with family members spouses co-workers with other church members maybe you had one around the thanksgiving table did you get into some conflict you know that's they warn against that don't talk about certain things at the dinner table because our hearts are prone to hold tightly onto some opinion that we have about something and and to demand that other people hold the same opinion

James speaks to our struggle with being lured away by substitutes and he calls us you adulterous people don't you know that friendship with the world is enmity with God ouch he says you adulterous people he asks us in chapter 4 what causes quarrels and fights and causes fights among you is it not this that your passions are at war within you you desire and do not have so you murder remember murder in our hearts counts as murder he says you covet and cannot obtain so you fight and quarrel you do not have because you do not ask so he calls us to pray to ask God for the things that we want to pray for one another to pray for ourselves to pray for our own hearts James is reminding us that we all have root sins and fruit sins you know the difference root sins and fruit sins the fruit sins we see on the surface like quarreling or gossip or worse and we need to repent and turn away from those sins and those sins are like the shark's fin you know in the water if you've ever been swimming or surfing and you see a shark's fin you know what happens on the beach right people get as far away as they can from that fin as fast as they can but the root sins are like the body of the shark that you may not see below the surface much more dangerous than the fin and James calls them passions that are at war within us this war that's always going on between the flesh and the spirit in us if you only try to deal with your surface sins and neglect to faithfully search out your heart for the root sins and you're kind of like the swimmer who is battling against the fin to try to attack the shark you know we see how God's concern with what's going at the heart level applies to our conflicts let's try to apply it to parenting as another example so I read something this week by Josiah Bancroft who is one of the leaders of Surge mission that was helpful in applying it to myself as a parent

I still I got some grown kids but I'm still a parent so I'm you know I'm I still got a responsibility as a dad to kind of help them along the way to try to apply the gospel to their conflicts to their trouble their issues and it's helpful for me to remember in parenting that because we still live in an imperfect world and as a parent I'm not perfect myself everything I do and everything my children do is somewhat tainted with rebellion because of the fall because of our condition our disposition to sin but as a Christian parent the good news is everything I do is also washed in Christ's blood and I must watch my heart and be concerned with my children's hearts and I mustn't make peace with sin I must remember who I am and not be discouraged by the struggle and the sin in the world and Satan's craftiness as the chief liar that's seeking to deceive me and deceive my kids you know I must remind them that they are ultimately defined by their relationship to Jesus not by the perfection of their lives they're never going to attain perfection they're always going to have this remaining corruption in this life and as I regularly remind myself and my kids of our gospel identity then as I receive by faith the truth of who I am in Christ and see the present value of his blood and righteousness then I'm able to operate in this tension there's a real tension between being a sinner and a saint and I'm able to stand in the tension between simultaneously being having remaining corruption and a saint declared by God to be holy and perfect and righteous in his sight completely accepted by him I can live in that tension without hypocrisy but with faith you know none of us wants our children to become like the younger brother right nor do we want our children to become like the elder brother that just this outward performance looks good on the outside successful faithful loyal but on the inside ooh a lot of you know gets left outside the relationship with the father is broken doesn't love mercy and grace you know we just want our kids to experience a growing intimacy with the father through faith in Christ that they they come to have their own relationship with him that's growing because of their their identity is in the gospel if you're in Christ you know this parable is a picture of what the heavenly father has done to embrace you and to kiss you and to honor you as a son or a daughter and not to treat you as a hired servant and he delights in repentance he delights in a broken and a contrite heart

[21 : 34] God is not so much concerned with outward conformity with mere outward conformity he's not concerned at all he would resist that if that's all it was it wasn't coming from a heart that is changed because of his embrace remember the question we started out with right what is the one

thing that makes our heavenly father most happy that gives him the greatest joy and in this parable Jesus is teaching us that it's when we sinners repent and we you know we know that our need for repentance doesn't just end at conversion that repentance is a one time thing for us but it's an ongoing throughout our life God rejoices to see sinners who live this lifestyle of repentance and faith this is a cyclical pattern for us repentance renewed faith new obedience repentance renewed faith new obedience obedience it's this pattern for living and growing in the Christian life repent believe obey repent believe obey when we're walking with the Holy Spirit and he whispers to us you know I know this has happened to you a thought comes to you that's not from your flesh but it's got to be from the Spirit and he says remember what you said that angry word that you said to your spouse or to your child do you think that was the right way to respond and you go oh man I wish I could take that back I wish I could you know go back and change that I need to repent right that's the work of the Holy Spirit or that that thought you know the Holy Spirit just comes to you and says oh that thought that you just had you know that impure thought do you think that is honoring to the Lord and and you go oh I I repent I I believe again the gospel that is for me I will seek new obedience you know that's that's the Spirit filled life right that's the that's this battle between the flesh and the Spirit that we if you have the Holy Spirit in you you're going to have those experiences more and more where you know that you are convicted by the Holy Spirit and we should say yes thank you it should be a joyful thing that we say thank you Father for the grace for the for your mercy because repentance is a gift from you that you have given to me and so thank you I I joyfully and freely repent confession and sin and assurance and pardon is not just for the third Sunday of the month before communion right it's it's to be every Sunday every day it's to be a lifestyle we must remind ourselves that our sin nature will not be eradicated in this life that you know even though we've been born again and we're new creatures in Christ and the completion of our salvation is 100% guaranteed by God you know during our remaining days in this life we are truly at the same time both justified and sinners you know Martin Luther talked about this and he there's this well-known phrase in Latin that Martin Luther coined simul iustus et peccator describes the condition of every Christian as both sinner saint and justified sinner both together until we're released from this remaining sin at the point of death no one wants to die but the best thing about death is going to be that your lifelong battle with sin and remaining corruption is over that's going to be the most glorious thing for you that you no longer have this weight there's no longer this struggle this battle between the flesh and the spirit hallelujah so the younger son by God's grace he came to his senses and he repented he humbled himself and turned away from his son the older son couldn't see his sin he had a hard time seeing beneath the surface he remained angry and distant separated himself from the gracious father he was not a fan of mercy and grace and of loving kindness and he scorned the younger brother and he was angry with the gracious father and in the parable he reveals what was truly in his heart look father these many years I've served you literally I've slaved for you and I never disobeyed your command he thought more highly of himself than he should have right this brother was he was the poorer of the two because he was depending on the wrong thing for his identity he was missing the gospel and like the Pharisees and the scribes he was too proud of what he had accomplished to see his sin and be able to show mercy to other sinners God rejoices over the rebellious who turn back to him in faith and he loves to give grace to the humble but the proud we know he resists right unfortunately the proud usually end up outside because they're unwilling to recognize their sin because Jesus has paid the full penalty for our sins God the Father he doesn't need you to pay for yours he doesn't need you to pay for your sin there may be natural consequences for your sin but those consequences are not payment you can't pay God back for your sin against him God doesn't need you to bargain with him that if he just lets you be a servant in the house you'd be loyal to him no he asks you to receive his forgiveness by faith every day in the work that what he has already done what he's accomplished the inheritance that he has available to us only because of his work Christian life doesn't involve your paying for your sin but it does require ongoing repentance for sin with a broken and contrite heart we don't just live any way that we please taking for granted God's grace that is shown to us because his grace is shown to us every single day if you have faith that's a gift of God if your faith is increasing if you ever repent that's a gift of God that he's pouring out his grace to you and so that should make us come with a broken and contrite heart to want to repent to want to draw closer to him Martin Luther in 1517 when he nailed his 95 theses on the cathedral door in Wittenberg he started off with his first

thesis you remember it says when our Lord and Master

[28 : 37] Jesus Christ said repent he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance that was the very first statement that he wanted everybody to know he wanted the leaders in the Roman church to start off with that that their lives should be one of ongoing repentance 40 years later John Calvin you know he began to explain the doctrines of the Protestant Reformed faith more systematically and he wrote the Institutes of Christian Religion he wrote that God assigns to each of us a race of repentance to run during our whole life so it's like this marathon that we are all in and it's really a marathon of repentance that our whole lives we are running this race of repentance Thomas Watson he wrote a classic in 1668 the doctrine of repentance where he talks about our need for repentance as a continuous act that must not be stopped until death and Watson says the two great graces essential to a saint in this life are faith and repentance they're the two wings by which we fly to heaven faith and repentance so don't try to fly with just one wing he says both are important faith and ongoing repentance we also see this understanding of lifestyle repentance and faith in the writing of John Wesley another example from one of our contemporary theologians

Michael Horton he speaks of repentance as a perpetual cycle that defines the Christian life another contemporary theologian Wayne Grudem he writes it's important to realize that faith and repentance are not confirmed confined to the beginning of the Christian life they're rather attitudes of the heart that continue throughout our lives as Christians and finally John Murray he makes the case that just as faith is constant throughout the Christian life so is repentance he describes them as two sides of the same coin faith and repentance and he says the broken spirit and contrite heart are abiding marks of the believing soul he says Christ's blood is the bowl of initial cleansing but it's also the fountain to which the believer must continually go for repair so the blood of Christ we know that cleanses us from sins it's this ongoing he describes it as this fountain that is needed to go back to on a regular basis when our family lived in Jamaica our mission had a building project at a church up in the cool hills of Manchester that I would help with and it was a basic school that this church was building a building kind of like we have done here with a school a lot of churches in Jamaica will have a basic school for three four and five year olds in their building and we were helping with that and I'd go up there sometimes for a week with a team before a team would come from the United States and before leaving every time there was this dear woman

Mrs. Palmer who is a praying saint if there ever was one she would want to walk around my car and she would pray the blood of Jesus over my car you know there's bad accidents in Jamaica like there are here but you know accidents that you you don't know how something could happen as terrible as that but she would go around the car and she'd say the blood of Jesus the blood of Jesus the blood of Jesus no power no weapon that's formed against you can prosper Pastor Billy you know if I were John Murray or Michael Horton or Martin Luther I would likely have said to Mrs. Palmer come pray that over me because I need the blood of Jesus right I need the blood of Jesus to be prayed over me on a regular basis because I need repentance and I need greater faith to trust him you know when you know that the Heavenly Father embraces you as his son or daughter you know one of the ways you embrace him back is with a contrite a broken and a contrite heart each day in faith and there's great joy in heaven when one sinner repents and believes the gospel again and again and again and we tend to think of that as when someone gets saved gloriously saved that you know the angels and the Lord they're doing high fives and they're running around heaven kind of like the when the if you watch any of the

World Cup soccer you know what happens you know after the 75th minute the first goal is scored and just you know pandemonium erupts you know maybe that's what it is in heaven when when sinners repent but I don't think he's just talking about at conversion because repentance is an ongoing there's delight and joy in heaven when we come to our senses in an ongoing way and we repent of our sins great joy when one sinner repents and believes the gospel again and again and again you know we live in this biblical tension of being sinners in need of a savior every single day and the same time we're glorious saints declared to be forever righteous in Christ and there's no hypocrisy we don't live in this tension with hypocrisy but it's it's with faith because this is what God has said this is God's word to us our true identity is both sinner and saint at the same time so it should keep us humble and dependent with a brokenness over our sin like the sinful woman who wept at Jesus' feet right not like the proud Pharisees and the scribes who grumbled against Jesus who judged him because of some of his behavior so what do we do with all of this this tension well we need to be more self-aware right of our own hearts need for repentance and faith to believe who

we are in Christ we need to practice more of a contemplative type Christian life we need to be more compassionate toward younger brothers and older brothers and more like the gracious father longing for their return we need to guard our own hearts against the subtle sins of pride and judgmentalism of others we need to develop a posture of coming alongside sinners rather than kind of a top-down posture like the Pharisees had we need to recognize our own brokenness we need to see in Christ our perfect older brother and his way of welcoming sinners into fellowship with radical extravagant grace we need to consider the worst sinner we know think about the worst sinner that you know we need to think of that person as better than ourselves we need to remember that no sinner is beyond God's gracious offer of forgiveness amen because you weren't beyond his gracious offer if you have put your trust and faith in him so where are you finding it hard to show mercy where are you finding it hard to show grace to another person you know where are you judging someone because they've not lived up to your standards maybe at your workplace maybe in your family maybe with your kids or maybe it's with a parent or maybe it's in your church you know where do you want to see

God bring justice to sinners you know when we keep coming back to the Jesus lens through which we should see our lives and our challenges and through which we should see all other people it's the gospel that motivates us to not lose heart when we understand our own identity and the identity of everyone else in Christ and of course it's also the gospel that gives us the power to move out in love for our children for our spouse for our neighbor our fellow church members our fellow Americans that make us so angry whoever it may be it's the power of the gospel what did Paul say about the gospel in Romans 1 verse 16 he says I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes it's the power for us not just at conversion but as we go through the Christian life the gospel is the power to help us to repent and believe to trust God to repent believe obey repent believe obey so you believe the gospel keep believing it keep rejoicing in it keep repenting and believing again the good news keep applying it to every nook and cranny of your complicated life apply the gospel to everything keep living by you know stop living by the law of merit and live by the law of grace that's the gospel is the living by the law of grace keep coming back to the recklessly extravagant grace of your heavenly father amen amen let's pray father we thank you for your word thank you for this familiar parable thank you lord Jesus for making the gospel so clear to us in stories in parables like like these in Luke 15 we know that we need your grace every day to turn away from the sins of commission and the sins of omission that we are guilty of help us to repent and believe the truths of the gospel moment by moment day by day throughout the rest of our lives for the joy of the lord and we give you thanks in Christ's name amen