

JARS

Luke Slide

At the end of the message, I'm going to give you the opportunity today to take a step toward God.
...and then I'm going to give you the opportunity to take a step toward other people.

I have already prayed for you today, that today is the start of a new beginning of a relationship with God and a relationship with people....one like you have never experienced in your life.

Here's how we are going to arrive at that point.

I'm going to tell you a story Jesus told to teach us about God. And what he said was one of the most controversial...and most powerful thing people had ever heard.

Just imagine if you came here today and I said "Everything you think about God is wrong." Would that be scandalous to you? Would it make you think "Who is he to tell me about God?" Would it make you angry?

If so, then you feel EXACTLY the way Jesus' original audience felt. Angry and Ready to kill.

Title Slide "Celebrate Good Times, Come Home: How to Stop Keeping Yourself from Joy"- Luke 15:11-32

One more word of warning. As with any sermon- but i think especially for this one- it will be tempting for you to hear this sermon for somebody else. You'll identify with the hero...and you'll point to someone else...some other group...some person you don't like very much right now- they will be the bad guy...and you will be the hero.

...and in a way...thats kind of the point of the story. Will those who are blind open their eyes to see... or are you waiting on someone else to change?

Today, we're going to look at longest recorded story Jesus ever told. And we're gonna start with his audience.

Luke 15:1-2

All the tax collectors and sinners were approaching to listen to him.2 And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Here's all you need to know about the audience to Jesus' story. Jesus is telling this story to a mixed bag. It's a bunch of **religious** people with a bunch of **rebellious** people. (Broad categories...but they both start with R)

- Every Sunday sitting in our church's worship gathering, every day sitting at your schools, and in cubicles and offices where you work- are people who have been to church all their lives, and people who have never read the Bible.(Sometime thats the same person)
- There are people who woke up with hangover in bed with someone they don't even know on Sunday morning...and people who won't watch R rated movies.
- In every group there are people who are cheating on their taxes and people who lead small group Bible studies. And sometimes...that's the same person.
- Jesus is talking to both of the groups in this story.

Because the truth is, we all find ourselves in one of those categories. Rebellious....or Religious...and sometimes, we are a nasty blend of both.

Luke 15: 6-7 & 9-10 (BOLD "REJOICE" & "JOY")

the other thing I want you notice is the 2 stories that precede the longer story (about a shepherd finding a lost sheep, and a woman finding a lost coin) are about the JOY of REPENTANCE.

Specifically- God's JOY when People finally stop fighting against his calling- and embrace his love. These are all stories about the JOY of being found. the joy of coming home.

Ok,...now to the story.

Luke 15:11-12a

11 He also said, "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.'

- Ok, this is the first shocking thing Jesus said. See in this culture, a wealthy land owning Father would have been someone who demanded the pinnacle of respect...especially from his sons.
- And now, the younger son has just walked up his dad and said, "Can we pretend you're dead so I can get what I have coming"
- See, he wants his Dad's money, but he doesn't want his dad.
- I gotta say, as a Dad, It's hard to imagine anything more gut-wrenchingly painful than one of my sons coming to me when they turn 18 and say, "Dad, I don't want you anymore. I don't want you in my life, and I don't want to talk to you anymore. I don't want your grandkids to know you or my future wife to know you. Just give me some money and get out of my life."
- Its hard for me to name anything that would hurt me more deeply.
- See, Jesus is giving you a picture of what sin is like to God.
- **Sin is using the gifts of God for yourself while you reject a relationship with God.**
- **Valuing what you can get from him...instead of valuing God himself.**
- Ultimately, its kicking God out of your life because you hate his control...and frankly, you think you could do it better.
- Its rebellion at its finest.
- The way the Father felt when his son wished him dead, is the way God the Father feels when we sin against him. Deeply hurt and dishonored.
- **Sin is wishing God dead, to get what we think will make us happy.**

[PAUSE]

Now, the religious leaders, the Pharisees and Scribes, at this point are foaming at the mouth...and they are ready for the Father to drop the hammer.

- In Jewish law, you could have a son like this executed.
- At the very least, he would be excommunicated from the entire community. Everyone in the town would shun him.

...and that's why the next statement just upped the controversy.

Luke 15:12b- So he distributed the assets to them.

- The Father actually gives the son his request.
- He gives the son what he asks for. HE LETS HIM GO!
- Imagine the heartbreak of the Father as he watches the son leave.
- The Father has just been traded for a bag full of stuff.

Luke 15:13-16

- **Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. 14 After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. 15 Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to eat his fill from the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything.**
- Its right here that the rebellious in the audience start nodding their heads. "Yep. Been there."
- I mean, why do you think it was always the rebellious people who were trying to get the front row seats to Jesus' TED talks?
- Its because the way he would talk about their life of rebellion was so...spot on. He would get into their hearts...but not like the religious people would do it. He wouldn't yell at them to change their ways. Instead, he would show them the futility of what they were chasing...how it not only broke their hearts, but God's heart too.

- That's what he shows in this part of the story. He shows them the futility of sin.
- Look, it starts great. At first, the younger son gets everything he's looking for. He goes to a far country away from his Dad.
- And he lives "recklessly". Now, this word reckless just means...**not thinking about the consequences**. It means that he's wasteful. That he's living in a way that isn't considering the future.
- Reckless means...YOLO. Use it or lose it.
- This word reckless is where we get the word "Prodigal". Prodigal doesn't mean "lost". **Prodigal means wasteful**.
- And, at first, this prodigal life gives the younger son exactly what he's looking for. Control over his own life. He gets to party when he wants to, buy what he wants to, including his friends, without the pressure of his Father in his life.
- Life is good....until everything disappears. There is a famine, and he runs out of money, he is forced to feed pigs, the dirtiest job in the country. But even the pigs have more than he does.
- You see in v 15 where it says he "**hired himself out**". You know in the Greek...the original language of the New Testament...this means that he **Attached** himself to...or glued himself to this pig farmer. Like a parasite.
- Do you see the futility of his rebellion? He **detached** from his Father who had given him everything....so he could be in control of his life. But now he had to **attach himself** to a stranger, like a parasite...he has no control whatsoever...and NO ONE GAVE HIM ANYTHING.
- He thought his rebellion from the Father would end in his independence, but it has ended in his overdependence.
- That is futility. Trying to move forward, but actually going backwards.

- Some of you are sitting here today, and, at least on the inside, you're nodding your head to this part of the story just like the sinners and tax collectors did when Jesus told it the first time. Because you see yourself in the younger son. You've embraced rebellion and come to the end of your rope. You're in a place today where you are beginning to see that all your rebellion has not gotten you what you thought. You've found yourself eating with the pigs.
- **Maybe it's the pigsty of sexual rebellion.** You've used what God gave you as a gift to glorify him... as a desperate way to hear someone say "I love you"...even if you know he doesn't mean it.
- Maybe you find yourself eating with the pigs of a **broken relationship**. You forgot God as your Father and put all your hope in another person. And now they've left you. And it all looks futile.
- **Maybe you've attached yourself to athletics or a hobby.** The attention and respect you get are something you felt you could never get from God...so you left him behind to get what you really wanted in the first place.
- **Maybe its something nobody knows about.** But all you see on the other side of this hidden sin is a wreck of a life that you can't get out of.
- All of our rebellious pursuits are futile. And they all end up in the pig pen.
 - There is no doubt that there is pleasure in sin...but only for a season.
 - The thing is, when you are created to be satisfied only by a relationship with God and his family, no substitute will distract you from that hunger for very long.
- You'll always be found wanting.

Sin = Autonomy
Auto- Self
Nomos- Law

Making your own law

So of you redefined sexuality- outside of the context of a committed marriage between one man and one woman. You gave yourself to pornography, or to hook ups, or even simply to the idea that God doesn't really care about your sexuality at all. You made a new law for yourself. And you have either hit the bottom- and are reeling...or you will very soon.

Some of you have squandered relationships because you want to hold so tightly to your political opinions. Or you are refusing forgiveness because somebody has broken YOUR POLITICAL LAW- and there won't be forgiveness until you make them suffer for what they did to you.

All of it. ALL OF IT. Is a bloody revolution. It is wishing God dead- no matter how much you show up to church and sing songs about how much you love him- Its all wishing God dead so you can be autonomous- and make your own law.

If that's you today, what I am about to show you is why the Rebellious were always sitting right up front when Jesus spoke. Because he gave them such hope.

See, **God the Father does not stop loving you when you are in the far country of rebellion.**

Remember the other 2 stories that Jesus told right before this?

One is about a shepherd, who loses one of his 100 sheep, and though he has 99 others, he still goes out after the one that's lost and celebrates when it returns.

The other is about a woman who loses one of her 10 coins and sweeps the house until she finds it even though she still has 9.

You know what Jesus is doing?

He is increasing the value of the thing lost as he goes along.

The first is a sheep...just one of 100.

The second is about money. One coin in only 10.

Then finally, this story, is about a son. 1 of only 2.

To put this in modern terms, not long ago, I thought I left my wallet at a coffee shop. Immediately I had this feeling of "Oh no! I gotta go back and see if its there!" I eventually found it sitting right next to me in my office, when I did, **I was relieved.** But I didn't hug my wallet when I found it.

...because finding my wallet doesn't compare even in the slightest to the way I felt when I thought my 2 year old son was lost at the mall several years ago. He had somehow walked out of the store we were in and made it down to the cell phone case kiosk about 60 feet away. But when I didn't know where he was, that 60 feet might as well have been the Pacific Ocean! He was LOST!

I ran out of the store, I immediately lost all pretentiousness. Normally I wouldn't yell at strangers. But that day I said, "Hey, has anyone seen a little 2 year old boy?"

In that moment my heart was in my stomach, I wanted to throw up, and I didn't have the slightest care about me, or if people thought I was crazy...I only wanted my son...because he was lost...and I love him. When I found him, I scooped him up and hugged him and kissed his cheek. **I was overjoyed.**

I wouldn't have done that for my wallet. Only for my son. If I wouldn't have found my wallet, I would have just called and canceled my credit cards. But even though I have 2 other sons, if I wouldn't have found my youngest son...I wouldn't have just called the US gov't and said, "Cancel his Social Security number...can't find him...but I have to move on."

Jesus is showing us the way the Father aches for our return. Even in the middle of our sinful rebellion against him, he is not hoping we "get what we have coming to us"...he wants us to come to our senses. He wants us to wake up...and come home. He loves us even as we are rejecting him in the far country.

Take a look.

Luke 15:17-19

When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. 19 I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers."

- The son woke up. He realized the futility of his life.
- Finally, he saw that what he had with his Father had always been far better than anything he had found in the far country.
- This is called repentance. Repentance is simply the moment that you realize the futility of the way you are seeking joy.
 - It's the moment you realize that rebellion isn't taking you anywhere good.
 - It's the moment where you see that no matter how much you try to distract yourself with money, or position, or sex, or prestige, or drugs, or posting an Insta reel that people like...or whatever it is that gives you the rush of dopamine that just for a second makes you feel invincible.
 - ...repentance is the moment you see despite your achievements, despite your rebellion...that your heart is still a wound up clock...with a finite number of beats... and every second you are getting closer to death...and you realize that none of the highs...none of the accolades...none of the temporary blasts of pleasure is going to do a thing about that.
- Repentance is coming to your senses and saying, "There must be something better than this". No one except my Father has ever given me anything!
- And repentance is exactly where so many people get God wrong.
- The younger son does....did you see it?
- See after he realizes that his efforts to find joy and control in his life were futile, he decides to go back to his Father. But look what he says.
- **V 18-** he makes a plan to pay his Father back.

- He's going to go back to his Father and convince his Father to take him back.
- And he's going to do that by showing he's worth something.
- He's going to work for his father.
- See, a "hired servant" was different than a house servant. A hired servant worked NEAR the house...but not, IN THE HOUSE.
- In other words, this son was going to say to his Father, "I know what I did hurt you, and I know that I owe you a fortune...so I'll keep my distance, until I've worked long enough to pay you back. I don't deserve to be a house servant...so I'll be a hired servant."
- That's where repentance goes wrong for so many people.
- See, though he realizes his rebellion was futile...he still doesn't know who his Father is. He thinks his Father is going to need payment.
- You know what that is? Its religion.
- Religion says, "You have to pay God off to get what you want"
- But that is not what a Father does to a son.
- Can you imagine if when I found my 2 year old son in the mall, I said, "Before I take you home, You are going to have to do something to pay me back for my emotional distress. You gonna buy me one of those cell phone cases you were looking at?"
- But this is not how God works. **The whole point of the Father's emotional distress IS to get the son home!**
- You cannot work to pay God off. You owe him too much. Besides, he doesn't want something from you. He wants YOU to be back home. With the family.
- And that's exactly why the Father cuts off the younger sons speech before he can even get the words out about being a hired servant.
- Take a look

Luke 15:20-21

So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. 21 The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'

- Before the son can say a word about being a hired servant, or make a promise, or sweeten the deal...the Father embraces him.
- His Father sees him and runs and hugs him and kisses him.
- And can you see it? As the Father has already embraced him... already run out to him...he is still trying to earn his Father's love.
- Isn't that insane?
- This is what religion does. Religion ignores the love of God that you already have and focuses on EARNING God's love...as if he hasn't already offered it freely.
- There's something else here that you need to see.
- **Well-respected wealthy middle eastern men DO NOT RUN.**
- It would be shameful to run. In fact, because of the long robes this man would have worn, in order to run he would have had to hike up his robes, exposing his bare legs...and sprint through the middle of the town...for everyone to see.
- At this moment...the religious Pharisees would have been absolutely livid.
- This son deserves death. He should be executed according to the law. **HE** should be shamed in front of everyone. Not the father. The Father has done nothing wrong.
- At this moment every religious Pharisee hearing Jesus' story would now call the Father the prodigal. The Father is being reckless and wasteful with his love. The Father is shaming himself for the sake of the dishonorable son.
- Why is the Father taking the shame of the son on himself? What a Wasteful, reckless, prodigal father.

- **[PAUSE]**...and that is exactly Jesus' point. The Father is Reckless with his love.
- This is where the gospel comes in.
- **Jesus' cross is the Father running to us, taking our shame on himself.**
 - In Jesus Christ, God was whipped, beaten, spat upon, nails were driven into his hands and feet.
 - He was hung naked. Exposed. Shamed in the middle of a public place.
 - When Jesus died on the Cross, God himself was taking on our sin and shame to bring us back into his house.
 - God himself took our place for our rebellion so we don't have to pay him back, we simply have to turn around and go home.

Luke 15:22-24

22 "But the father told his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate.

- The Father doesn't even let the son get a word about being a servant out of his mouth. Instead, he cuts off the son's prepared speech to tell him he is already a son.
- See, he gives him 3 gifts
 - **A Robe...the best robe would have belonged to the Father.** The father is clothing him in his own garments
 - **A ring is a symbol of authority.** The father is saying, what is mine is now yours
 - **And sandals are a sign of wealth.** Servants didn't wear shoes in the house...only sons did.
- The son was going to request to be made a servant...but instead the Father had already determined to restore him as a son.
- No shaming. No punishment.

- SO who paid for all that reckless living and squandering of property? The prodigal father absorbed the cost.
- Incredible. This is grace. The reckless rebellion of the son is totally swallowed up in the reckless grace and forgiveness of his Father.
- And now, there is nothing but Resurrection. Restoration as a son.
- ...which is exactly why the resurrection of Jesus from the dead changes everything.
- **The Resurrection is proof that Jesus is redefining us as sons and daughters.** That he is indeed making everything right again. That he is making all things new.
 - Because Jesus resurrected, he gives the robe of his righteousness to all his brothers and sisters who are not righteous.
 - Because Jesus resurrected, he gives us the ring of a new life. Where we can overcome sin and death, we have the authority that only God has to escape the curse of our futile rebellion and live eternally.
 - Because Jesus resurrected, we are adopted as sons, so we are now welcome in the house of our Father.
 - We have access to him like never before.
- **ILLUS:** See, there are only 3 people who could ever run in my bedroom tap me on the shoulder and I just throw back the covers.
 - None of you can do that (that would be weird...and shameful)...but all 3 of my sons can. They have complete access to me at any time.
- Because they are sons, and I am their Father.
- See, if Jesus died and rose from the dead, it means there is no country too far, no rebellion too deep, no sin too great, to keep you from the depth of your Father's love and embrace....all you lack is to come to your senses...turn around...and go home.
- No speech necessary...no payment required.

There is nothing you can do to make God love you more...and nothing you can do to make God love you less. He's your Father. Come home.

TRANSITION: The story is almost over. Remember...that older brother? I wonder what he's up to?

Luke 15:25-30

- **"Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant. 27 'Your brother is here,' he told him, 'and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'**
- **28 "Then he became angry and didn't want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 But he replied to his father, 'Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.'**
- The older son is the one the Religious Pharisees loved. After all, he was playing by the rules. Doing everything right. Working hard.
- But underneath, you see his heart...and it is completely the opposite of his Father's heart. Its not love...its hate. Its self-righteousness.
- The older son has no relationship with his Father, either.
- Sure he never ran off to a far country, but he's only worked at home to get something from his Father.

He sees himself not even as a hired servant...but a captive slave. He doesn't see the Father's way of life as life-giving...but as a trade off. I do the stuff I don't like- then you give me what I want.

Anger & Self-Pity with the older son. Inability to see the invitation to joy.

He is unable to see the person on the other side as anything other than an enemy and a threat.- Highlights he spent his money on prostitutes- which is an assumption. To help fuel his anger

- His attitude toward his father is evident when he doesn't address the father with respect. He says "LOOK, you never gave me what I earned!"
- "You throw the party of the year for that little ingrate... meanwhile I've done everything right and you don't so much as let me have a sleepover with my buddies."
- Notice- he's not interested in having a party with his father. If he gets what he wants- he parties AWAY from his father and with his friends
- See, if I asked you, "**which son does the Father love more?**"...you might answer the older son. At least the older son never wasted the Father's inheritance.
- Well, are you sure? In fact, the older son is a prodigal, too. He is so close to the Father... geographically, just right outside the house...but he has wasted his time by never really getting close to the Father's heart. He wastes the opportunity for a relationship with his Father. He will not come in and BE with his father. He just wants to work for him to get a reward. In fact, he really just wants the same thing the younger son did. He doesn't want his Father...he just wants a bag of stuff from his Father.
- *(all the next 4 points on the same slide together)*
- The truth is...
- **Rebellion and Religion are the same sin, dressed up in different clothes.**
- **The Religious obey to get what they want.**
- **The Rebellious disobey to get what they want.**
- **Both are using the Father to get what they want.**
- Whether you're in a far country...or just right outside the house...its all separated from your Father. The difference between heaven and hell is not whether you've obeyed or disobeyed the Father...its whether you've humbled yourself and embraced a relationship with him and come into the party.
- Some of you are the older brother today.

- You have been working so hard at obeying all the 10 commandants, impressing God with how good you are, how right you are...that you have failed to see that your heart looks nothing like Gods.

You have created your own religion. You, just like the younger brother you accuse- are autonomous. you have created your own set of rules for other- ones you aren't even keeping yourself. You have created a narrative about the bad guys- the sinners and tax collectors- that highlights their sin...and minimizes or is completely blind to your own.

And so you live a life with very little joy...and full of anger and self-pity.

- You've cleaned up the outside according to a law your father never even gave you, but the inside is decaying away.
- ...and the best measurement for your self-righteousness...is to see how angry you get at God's grace. Do you celebrate when the younger son comes home? Can you see God at work in the people you hate?
- Or do you think your moral law keeping should have you celebrated first?

Listen, whether you're avoiding God with Rebellion or Religion...I have good news. Jesus died for all of that sin.

Because the Father goes out to the older brother too.

Luke 15:31-32

- **'Son,' he said to him, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'**
- This is amazing. Whether you have rejected God in rebellion, or ignored him with your religion and self-righteousness....he's coming to you today and saying...I love you. All I have is yours.
- Just like the father left the house to embrace his reckless younger son.

- The Father left the party to entreat his self-righteous older son.
- You know the difference between the two?
 - Simply the direction.
 - The younger son had repented. He had seen the futility of his sin and turned around. He didn't have a good plan. In fact, he was on his way to becoming the older son. He was going to work to earn it. But since he had turned around...he saw his Father coming to him. He knew his Father loved him.
 - But the older son had not seen the futility of his self-righteousness. He had not seen the great love of his Father and he had not seen the great joy of a relationship with him.
- And that is exactly why Jesus left the story as a cliff hanger.
- He never tells you what the Older Son decided to do.
- Remember, this story is directed to the Pharisees, whom the Older son represents.
- In essence, Jesus is saying "Pharisees, the choice is yours. What is the older brother going to do? Embrace the Father and come into the party, or begrudgingly stay in the outer darkness?"
- And today, God is leaving the end of this story up to you.
- God isn't forcing you to choose him....he died and resurrected...shamed himself and overcame your sin and death...just so you could be a son...and brother.
- But he's left you to decide...will you keep up your futile pursuits of joy and miss the one relationship that can ever truly satisfy you?

1 John 3:1a

See what great love the Father has given us that we should be called God's children — and we are!

CONCLUSION: Today, I'm going to give you a way to finish the story.

- A way to turn around and come home.

- Its simple. Talk to your Father. Pray.
- But don't, come at him with some prepared speech of how much you are going to do for him. He's not looking for you to pay him back. He's looking for you.
- Will you give yourself to today to the Father who took your shame, hiked up his robes on a cross, killed the fattened calf, and has a ring and a robe waiting on his child?
- Will you leave behind your religious plans to impress God, and talk to him today as your Father that already loves you...by the death and resurrection of Jesus, you can come to him today without paying him back. The debt is paid. Jesus said, "It is finished."
- Have you ever had the simple experience of praying to God, to tell him thank you for saving you. Have you ever received Christ into your life?
- Remember, he leaves the end of the story open, because its an invitation, not an imposition.
- So, If you've never done that, I'd like to help you do that today.
- Bow your heads with me. As I pray, you can pray to God in your head...there's nothing special about my words.
- They are only special if they are YOUR words to the Father that loves you.
- You can pray in this way today, **"Father, I receive your love and offer of salvation. I believe that in Jesus, you died in my place, taking away my rebellion and my shame. Then I believe you rose out of death...and that means that what you promised...you have delivered. I am now your son or daughter...you never turned your back on me...even when I turned my back on you.**
- **Thank you for loving me in the far country. Thank you for calling me into the party. You are now in charge of my life. You call the shots. I'm willing to go wherever you call me to go, and to do whatever you call me to do. Because I know you are a Good Father.**

- **Now, 2,000 years after you gave the invitation to come close to you...I accept. I am yours."**
- Religious Prayer of Repentance.
- Against fear and hate and anger- I'm not your slave...I'm your child.

Baptism Sunday
LORDS SUPPER

Prayer TEAM