Dismiss Redemption Kids… Luke 15 (pg. \_\_\_\_\_\_)

**“Prodigal God.”**

**Luke 15:1-32**

Today was supposed to be the last sermon in our Work Series, and I was really excited to look at the story of Daniel and how God empowered him in the most difficult of work situations as a captive in exile, but as I prepared for this morning, continued to pray, and spoke with each person being baptized this morning, I sensed God wanted us to shift gears.

I want to introduce or reintroduce you to a story that provides one of the clearest and most astounding pictures of (not our work) but God’s work in bringing us back into a relationship with him. Whether you are new to Christianity, reconnecting with faith in a deeper way, or have called yourself a Christian for many years, Luke 15 shows us the heart of God in a way that few other chapters in the Bible have the capacity to unfold.

The first few verses set the tone for the whole chapter. *Read 1-3*

* Verse 1 tells us great news: tax collectors & “sinners” drew near to Jesus. There was something magnetic about Jesus. Everywhere you turn in the gospels, you find imperfect people being drawn to him. The only problem was that the religious leaders, the Pharisees and scribes, actually thought *this was a problem!*
* They grumbled, saying, “Surely God couldn’t love these people. Surely God wouldn’t give these people another chance.”
  + “Tax collectors” were a despised group of people, because many of them used their work to swindle and steal from their debtors.
  + “Sinners” refer to those who live a blatantly immoral lifestyle, BUT Luke is really saying this is how the Pharisees, the religious leaders, viewed these people. That is why some translations put the word “sinners” in verse 2, in quotation marks to communicate that everyone in the story, except Jesus, should be classified as sinners.
* Their attitude provoked Jesus to tell three famous parables.
* *Trans*: I want to read the first two, the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin, primarily as reference points for the themes more fully developed in the parable of the Prodigal Son, which will be our focus this am.

*Read 4-7 & 8-10: Picture of a lost sheep and a lost coin… Briefly explain…* Jesus desperately wants you to…

**I. Recognize you are hopelessly lost apart from God’s grace (15:1-19).**

*Read 11-16*

* These two brothers could not be more different. The older brother was hard working, responsible, and compliant. The younger brother was carefree, irresponsible and driven by selfish ambition. So much so that he asks for his inheritance before his father’s death.
* Few actions in the first century could have been more offensive and disrespectful than this. The son essentially says, “I’ll take your gifts, but not you.”
* He then takes a trip very far away from the familiarity of home and the accountability of those who loved him. Verse 13 says, “he squandered his property in reckless living.”
* *This is where we get the term “prodigal.”* The word prodigal means “recklessly extravagant; [it refers to] someone who spends money and resources excessively, and lavishly.”
* The prodigal son represents hedonistic people who live life for themselves, without regard for God and his desires for us. His hedonism drove him to drink, party, hook up women, waste his money on fleeting pleasures that provide temporary satisfaction.
* By the way, we’re all hedonists. We all live for the pleasure of something. You may be like this son (perhaps not as wild, perhaps worse). The goal of your life is self-pleasure, but here’s the beauty of God’s plan: when we live for God’s pleasure, self-pleasure gets thrown in as well.

At some point, every person on the planet has to understand, their life is a picture of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and this prodigal son.

* **“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6)**
* Even though God has an impeccable vision for our lives, we have all deviated from his plan and done our own thing. “God, you’re wise, but I am wiser. You have a great plan, but not as good as mine.”
* And we say to God, “I’ll take your gifts but not you!”

Trans: But *verse 14-16* help us see that sin is pleasurable for a short season, but it carries a high price.

* He spent everything and found himself in a desperate situation. He runs out of cash, a famine hits, and instead of having money to burn, he has to get a job in a nasty pig pen.
* It was so bad that verse 16 tells us that he longed to eat the pods that the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. *P*
* This is our spiritual state. Apart from God’s grace, we are helpless, weak, and lost. His folly finally drives him to hit rock bottom.
* Can you see him there?

Trans: Verse 17 tells us what happened next… *Read 17-20a*

* “*He came to himself*.” The NIV says, “He came to his senses.” In the middle of all that now seemed so unfamiliar, he remembered the one who put food on the table and freely gave him the very best.
* Do you see how he was hungry for more than food; he wanted his relationship with his father to be restored.
* He finally see how heinous and offensive his actions were and that he not only sinned against his earthly father, but in a much greater way “sinned against heaven,” which is to say, he sinned against God, the heavenly Father.
* This is a picture of repentance and change, and this is how we should respond. If you want to have a true and vibrant relationship with God, there needs to come a time in your life when this happens.
* When you hear these stories today, you’ll hear about the moment God brought them to their senses and made the journey home through trusting in God’s gift to them in the cross & resurrection of Christ.
* So this desperate man resolves to go his father and beg him for mercy. *(18-19) “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me like one of your hired servants.”*

Trans: But in verse 20 the narrative shifts the spotlight from the son to the father, and we begin to…

**II. Realize God graciously pursues you with prodigal love. (15:20-32).**

*Read 20-24*

What is God’s love like? I want to give you 6 characteristics of **The love of God is…** #1

***Audacious.***

* The Father loves with a bold love. It says, “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran.” Jesus gives us the idea the Father was earnestly watching for his son to return, and as he sees that familiar silhouette against the horizon, he drops everything and runs.
* *“He ran!”* This action cut against all of the behavioral customs of the day. “Running was considered to be undignified for an older person, especially for wealthy landowner such as this man.” He demonstrates a total disregard for how others might view him and risks his reputation, because that’s what love does. His love was bold. #2. His love was gracious.

***Gracious.***

* P. The father had every right to be angry, to give him the cold shoulder, to treat him like a servant and not a son.
* But the father, once again, displays the love of God, because love takes the first step.
* Before you ever seeking after God, God was seeking after you! He is ready to extend the love and acceptance we do not deserve.
* His love was also…

***Affectionate.***

* When you love someone, everyone knows it. No one should be curious if you love your spouse.
* When It says “he ran and embraced him,” the word *embrace* in the Greek means he “fell on his neck.” He buried himself in his son. “and kissed him.” And then we see forgiveness.

***Forgiving.***

* As they embraced, the son began to speak (v.21): “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”
* Recount his sin… (foolishly spat in your face, I recklessly spent all you gave me) Recount our sin… (I have been proud, self-seeking, lying, lustful, greedy, embarrassment to you, God.)
* And before he can finish, the father interrupts: “Son, stop. I love you. I forgive you! It is time to celebrate!” which brings us to our to fifth characteristic of God’s love.

***Joyful.***

* Rejoicing (v.5) “Rejoice with me.” (v. 6) “more joy in heaven..” (v. 7)
* “Rejoice with me” (v. 9) “there is joy before the angels of God (v. 10)
* And they began to celebrate! In each of these three parables, there is a call to public rejoicing! Why? Because a miracle has taken place. Verse 24 is key: “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” And they began to celebrate.”
* Did you know the moment you came home, all of heaven rejoiced? Just admit it. You don’t have a framework for that.
* We these people tell their stories and get baptized, it is something of eternal significance, worthy of a greater celebration than a Stanley Cup or Championship Banner. So get excited about it! God’s love is audacious, gracious, affectionate, forgiving, joyful, AND…

***Prodigal.***

* Rather than the parable of the Prodigal Son, I would be more accurate to call this “The Parable of the Prodigal God.”
* God’s love is extravagant, free, abundant, excessively strong.
* Every time someone turns back to God through Jesus, God not only forgives them of their sin, but he puts a robe on their back, ring on their hand, shoes on their feet, and throws a party…
* *1 John 3:1 says in the NIV translation, “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God.”*

*Have you drawn near to Christ and his cross? Have you received this kind of love? P*

*Here’s some advice: Don’t wait. Now is the time. If you know in your heart of hearts you’ve never experienced God’s love in this way, run home and find him running home to embrace you today!*

We might expect the story to stop there, but remember, the father has two sons. The older son was working in the fields when his younger brother returned home. Listen to the rest of the story (*Read 25-32*).

* The older brother was angry. He wanted justice, not grace. Rather than rejoicing, he grumbles.
* Just like the Pharisees, standing outside of the party of God’s kingdom, the older brother refuses to go in. He crosses his arms, sits outside and pouts! “The apparent insider is an outsider.”(Bock)
* But the Father, once again, goes out to pursue his wayward son. (*Verse 28*: “His father came out and entreated him…”)
* Sadly, the older brother still refuses to go in. We find his rationale in *Verse 29:* “*I have* served, *I never* disobeyed your command, and *you never even* gave me a goat…”
* This is how Pharisees operate. They are obsessed comparing performance and base their worth before God and others on their performance.
* And here we learn there are two ways to reject the father and his love. One is blatant disrespect and immorality; the other is prideful moral goodness.
* The self-righteousness of the older brother actually alienated him from the father, because he felt like the father should be in his debt. He tried to control the Father’s love and action through his performance.
* Religion says, “I obey and perform, therefore I am accepted and loved.”
* The gospel says, “I’m loved and accepted through Christ with a prodigal love, therefore I will gladly obey.”
* Do you see the difference? It is the difference between sorrow and joy, between life and death, between heaven and hell.
* PLEASE do not have the attitude that says: I can get into heaven by being good enough, but no one is good enough. Why else would Jesus come and die for us, if we could be good enough? Everyone needs the free gift God extends to us through his Son, Jesus Christ.

The gospel is much more radical than we could imagine. God offers his gift of salvation to younger brothers and older brothers, and he offers it to you and me! So, today.. I want to invite you to…

**The Point: Receive and rejoice in the prodigal love of God.**

**Conclusion:**

The intensity of God’s love for you is beyond comparison. In each one of these stories, God comes after the one! That one is you.. If you were the only person on earth, Christ would have gladly died for you!

And with a smile on his face, and his arms outstretched, Jesus invites us home. It’s as simple: 1) Recognizing your Need (“he came to his senses); 2) Turning back to God (by confessing your sin); 3) Receive the gift of his love. (by faith.)

Return to God! Come home!

Pray: I want to invite you to bow your head and close your eyes. In the quiet of this moment, would you say, I need the prodigal love of God.

Call out to God and say, “God, I need you. I trust in the work of Christ on my behalf. I receive the gift of his substitutionary death and believe in his resurrection, and I’m coming home.” Pray.