

I. Introduction

- A. Continuing our series, The Final Word, you're going to hear what I'd say to you if I knew it was the last time I'd get to do this.
- B. I recently heard a song called "Reckless Love" and at first it really bothered me.
  - 1. "Oh the overwhelming, never ending, reckless love of God."
  - 2. The actual definition of the word: "Utterly unconcerned about the consequences of some action; without caution"
  - 3. Kids and I at park ... man ran into the street ... that's how I define reckless ... foolish!
  - 4. But then God put a different picture into my mind:
    - a. At park ... *your* child or someone else's child darts out into the street?
    - b. What is the flinch response?
      - 1) To run out into oncoming traffic! Completely reckless and utterly unconcerned about the consequences of some action; without caution. There is nothing foolish, careless or erratic about that behavior.
      - 2) Love and mercy are driving you to be unconcerned about the consequences to yourself-only thinking about the consequences for that child if you *don't* act in such a reckless manner.
  - 5. There is this aspect to God's love that causes Him to pay no heed to the pain He endures to save us. A love that has no regard for personal dignity. A love that has no desire to keep account of wrongs.
  - 6. That song, by shocking my preconceptions, caused me to see God from a biblical perspective that I hadn't yet realized.
- C. In a similar, yet infinitely more profound way, Jesus told a story about God that was both scandalous and uncomfortable. It made the religious elite of that day furious because it didn't fit with their careful, dignified, cold, and calculating view of God.
  - 1. This story pits the foolish, careless, and EVIL recklessness of lost sons against the beautiful, love-fueled, intentional, and HOLY recklessness of their father.
  - 2. Open to Luke 15:11 (p. 1112)

## II. Historical context

- A. At the beginning of Luke 15, Luke writes, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to Him [Jesus]. And the Pharisees and scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."
- B. The religious elite of that day (Pharisees and scribes) had a major problem with the company Jesus was keeping.
  1. I can't believe I'm saying this ... empathize with the Pharisees' perspective for a second.
  2. Tax collectors were the financial arm of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire had invaded and conquered Israel and had perpetrated a cruel reign of terror over them.
  3. Tax collectors were local men, Jews from Israel, who signed up and even paid a startup fee to the Roman government so that they could collect taxes.
  4. Put yourself in the shoes of any Jew at that time: These tax collectors were funding this foreign invader to murder, rape, and abuse your family, your friends, your countrymen. These were traitors of the lowest kind.
- C. It's really easy for us to be critical of these religious elites and in many ways that might be justified.
  1. We should never minimize the seriousness of the sin that these "sinners and tax collectors" were guilty of.
  2. The darkness and depravity of their sin is the very backdrop that shows the Gospel to be so unimaginably glorious.
  3. It is in this setting of horrible sin and utter lostness that Jesus tells a story about a father and his sons.

## III. Body

### A. The younger lost son

11 "And he said, 'There was a man who had two sons. [This is a story about a FATHER and TWO sons, not just the one] 12 And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me." [Culturally: as good as saying, "I want you dead."] And he divided his property between them. [an incredibly gracious act] 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.'" (Luke 15:11-16)

1. This younger son comes to his father to demand what is coming to him, only to utterly reject and leave his father.
2. All my life, I've read this story and seen the younger and older sons as polar opposites.
3. But I want this to sink in for you right now as it did for me. The younger and older sons, at their core, are TWINS. Look ahead with me at v. 25.

#### B. The older lost son

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. [Culturally, this would have been a sign of complete contempt and rejection of his Father, to not attend his feast] His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Look, [incredibly disrespectful] 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. ["I've done everything you ever asked! And what have I gotten out of you? You should have given what was coming to me! Just like the younger son."] 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' (Luke 15:25-30)

1. This older son's heart was JUST as far from the father as his brother's was. When he looked at his Father, all he saw was dollar signs-what he'd get out of him for obedience, what he'd get out of him when he was dead.
2. Just look at the identical pattern of both sons' stories.
  - a. Younger son comes to the Father, disrespectfully demands what is his, and then utterly rejects the Father.
  - b. Older son comes to the Father, disrespectfully demands what is his, and then utterly rejects the Father.
3. Both rejected the father; they had just bought into different brands of rejection.
  - a. Researching washing machines. Went into Sears and talked with a salesman about two I was looking at. (outside: totally different; inside: made by same company in the same exact factory, just sold as two different brands)
  - b. The younger son had bought into the low-class brand of father-rejection called "immorality and scandal."

- c. The older son had bought the high-class, elite brand of father-rejection called “morality and self-righteousness.”
  - d. But when you look past the brands and exterior appearance of what these brothers had bought into, what you see on the inside is identical. Both of them had rejected their father.
4. **Rejection** of the Father is what makes us lost, not the **brand** of our rejection. But this rejection doesn't have to be the end of the story! Go back to v. 17

### C. Humble repentance and surrender

17 “But when he [the younger son] came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. [This is a true statement. He truly was no longer worthy.] Treat me as one of your hired servants. [Day laborer-not asking to live in the house, but come and go each day]””

1. Receiving grace is a matter of humility.
2. This lost son doesn't come home to his father with any claim to entitlement, only honest repentance and a willingness to surrender to whatever his father may ask.
3. The difference between lost sons and found sons is surrender.
4. And now, we get to the most shockingly beautiful part of the most shockingly beautiful story ever told: Look at v. 20.

### D. The father: Vv. 20a-24

20 “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 [Literally: “fell on his neck”] and kissed him. [In this day, fathers, men of stature, did not run-this was seen as completely undignified. But to not only run, but also embrace and kiss a son who had so shamed you and the family name, this was scandalous. I assure you that the people hearing this story had NEVER seen this done.] 21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ [true statement-but look at this: the father doesn't even let him finish his speech!] 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe [this would have been the father's own robe], and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand [signet ring-sign of sonship and authority in the house], and shoes on his feet. (only servants went barefoot. “This is no servant, this is MY SON!”] 23 And bring the

fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate."

1. With all my heart and soul, I am compelled to remind you of something, and I ask God to burn it into your soul.
  - a. This is how Jesus is describing the Father's reaction to YOU!
  - b. Yes, you are a sinner. Yes, you have done things that are despicable and make you unworthy of being His child.
  - c. But He sees you down the road, has deep compassion in His heart for you and RUNS to you. He RUNS to you and THROWS HIMSELF around your neck and KISSES YOU and says "ALL IS FORGIVEN! THIS IS MY SON! THIS IS MY DAUGHTER! REJOICE!"
  - d. What mercy and grace! What reckless love to pay no heed to what it would cost His dignity, what it would cost His heart, what it would cost His own Son!
2. The Father is better at forgiving us than we are at rejecting Him.
  - a. Humble repentance is how we stop running away from His mercy.
  - b. But the story isn't over. Look at how he responds to the older son, who does not see the evil in his heart and will not humble himself and come to the father in surrender.

28b "His father came out and entreated him, [begged him]"

-And after His own eldest son rejects him and scolds him, look what he says:

31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

C. The father loves both of his sons with undeserved, undignified, overwhelming grace.

Tim Keller : "The Gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope."

E. The true older brother

1. The younger son should have had an older brother who came after him.
2. Jesus is the truly righteousness Older Brother, because true righteousness is DRIVEN BY LOVE.

- a. True righteousness sees the lostness, brokenness, and plight of the lost ones and its heart breaks.
- b. True righteousness loves the Father so much that it leaves the safe and secure to seek out the sinful and the blind.
- c. True righteousness notices the one lost sheep and leaves the 99 in safety to reach the one.

#### IV. Things to Consider

##### A. Questions

1. Right now, am I more like the younger or the older brother? What does humble repentance look like for me right now?
2. God forgives you freely. Have you embraced that and accepted that you can't pay back a debt that's already been paid?

##### B. Actions

1. Forgive someone this week. We all have hurts and offenses that we hold onto. One of the best ways to experience God's mercy and forgiveness is to participate in it.
2. Read *The Prodigal God* (available for purchase at cost at the Welcome Center).
3. Sign up for Rescue Conference.

C. We need to stop the cycle of good intentions/no action with rescue.

D. Do something to equip yourself to be like OUR true older brother so that you'll leave safety and security and go find our lost brothers and sisters.

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