

At the End of the Day

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the gospel of Luke 15. Now as you're turning to Luke 15, this is one of those kind of pivotal Sundays in our life, is it not? It comes around each and every year, it is that first Sunday of the year where we have the opportunity to look back on the days past as well as to look forward to the days ahead, and as you're going to see in just a moment, it never ceases to amaze me as we enter somewhat of our third year of our Bible reading plan, that again the passages that we've been reading are so perfect for the days in which we're living.

As we look back and I know many of us don't want to look back on days past in this last calendar year, but who would have ever thought that looking back, that the least of the most significant events would have been raging forest fires and murder hornets? I mean, you look back on days past and you and I just in the last calendar year have discovered what it looks like to try to attempt to navigate a global pandemic. At the same time that we're navigating a global pandemic, we have had numerous uprising of societal tension, and along the way we've had somewhat, shall we say, of upheaval even within our political spectrum, and yet looking forward, I don't think there's really any of us that see any of it getting any better anytime soon. We're still in the midst of a global crisis. We're still learning things each and every day. We hoped, as I said earlier, that it would be somewhat behind us but there's still a lot ahead of us. The tensions that are in our culture and our society, they are still there under the undercurrents of life, and those who seem to be in positions of leadership who cannot seem to get along are still struggling at best.

So it's one of those days. We're looking back and looking forward, it really doesn't look much different, and so today we come to Luke 15 and the reason that I share with you that the Lord knew exactly what he was doing years ago when he put this chapter in this week of our lives, is because three years ago when we started reading through the Bible together, we had no idea that any of these three items of significance would be occurring, much less all at the same time. And so I want to give you a phrase of comfort as we walk into this new year, it's called "At the End of the Day." Now if you're not familiar with that phrase, it's somewhat of a colloquialism of our culture. If you're walking through something that is unpleasant or if you have something before you that you know you're going to have to endure, we often say, "Well, at the end of the day," basically when all the dust settles, when we get through whatever it is that we're concerned about or we

finish up that which we've been walking through, when we say, "At the end of the day," what we mean is, "In spite of all of that, this is what's truly important."

Luke 15, the Lord brings us to his feet literally. He brings humanity there and he begins to instruct us. In fact, Luke 15 is the most preached and taught on chapter in your Bible. Those of you who have grown up in church or been a part of church for many many years and decades, you may have notes in your Bible and you may say, "Oh, this is the prodigal son. Been there, done that. I got it. I've read this story." But we're going to read the entirety of Luke 15 today because, yes, the prodigal son is there and, yes, we're going to discuss who he is and how the Father responds to him and some of the parallels there, but before we read the entirety of the chapter, I want you to look at verse 3. It says, "And he spoke this parable to them." Now what's interesting is we're about to read the story of a man who has a sheep that has gone astray who he's going to go and rescue. We're about to read the story of a woman who has a coin that is missing, that she overturns the entire house and celebrates and rejoices when it is found. And we're about to read the story of a young man who wastes his entire inheritance on what the Bible calls riotous living. Last time I checked, that's a plurality, that's a multiplicity of stories but what does Jesus say? This parable. In fact, what we're about to read is the only time that we have in the Bible where Jesus tells more than one or two parables in a row without explaining them and here is why: we're about to read the same story told multiple ways. The story of the sheep is the same as the coin. The story of the coin is the same as the prodigal son. They're all the same story that's told a variety of ways. So beginning in verse 1, let's read this parable together. It says,

1 Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. 3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying, 4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? 5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. 7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. 8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? 9 And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. 10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. 11 And he said, A certain man had two sons: 12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. 13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. 14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty

famine in that land; and he began to be in want. 15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. 17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. 20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. 21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. 22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. 25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. 28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. 29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: 30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. 31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. 32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Today at the end of the day, no matter what befell us in days past, no matter what may befall us in days ahead, isn't it good to know that that which is lost can still be found?

This day, I think one of the things that we need to do is we need to remember, not just remember the year that we've just walked through but we need to remember who you and I really and truly are. I want you to notice in verse 1 and 2 the people that have gathered to hear Jesus speak this parable. It says in verse 1 that the publicans and the sinners. Now we know that Jesus took a lot of flack for allowing these people to be a part of his life but they are exactly what those descriptions are, they were those who society looked down upon, those who the culture said they are the unclean ones, they're on the other side of the tracks, they are not the ones that you wanted to live in the neighborhood of nor would you go to them as a reference on your resume. They were those in the culture that were the lowest of the low. But I want you to notice what happens in verse 2, and the Pharisees and the scribes. Now that's interesting. There could not be two polar opposites more opposite than these two groups of people. You've got the publicans and the sinners on

one side, those who most of humanity did not have or want anything to do with, and then you've got the Pharisees and the scribes on the other side, that's who everybody wanted to have some connection to. These were the movers and the shakers. These were those with large bank accounts, huge networking platforms. Their name on your resume or on your reference made all the difference in the world.

Now when you read these two verses, you think of that one group, the "them" of the passage, you think of the other group, these Pharisees and scribes, you know, you might identify with one of those two groups but do not the majority of us identify somewhere in the middle? We're not quite the publican but we know we're not the scribe? And that's going to be important in just a moment as we discover that Jesus utilizes these two polar spectrums of society to speak this parable to. Then we need to remember what the plot is. Now I mentioned earlier this parable, it's one story told multiple ways but let's walk through what the stories are and the first story is about a sheep that is lost, and we've discussed this is days past, it's probably not new to any of you and I don't mean to insult anybody who has these incredible animals as a part of their life but sheep are not known to be clean, they're not known to be smart, and they're really kind of stinky even from a distance. Can we all agree that the idea of taking a sheep that has been lost, wandering in the wilderness of life, going through the brier patches of life, and laying it across your shoulders? I don't know if you've ever had the experience of having one of your animals, we're dog people, of having a dog that's gotten in a place where it didn't need to go, as soon as it runs up to you, you're immediately making distance, right, because you don't want what it's got on you.

Then there's the second story, a woman who's lost a coin. Now have you ever read that story and thought to yourself, "What's the big deal about a quarter?" I mean, after all, if you've ever cleaned your couch lately, you have several coins that are probably under there. If you've ever vacuumed under your car, you'll discover that there are coins aplenty. But what we really discover is if we go back culturally in Jesus' time, this was more than just a means of currency. Notice that when she celebrates, she calls her neighbors and friends. Why would she not call her husband? Wouldn't that be the person that was in her immediate? The reason is in Jesus' culture 2,000 years ago, what we know as the dowry or the means by which a young lady could marry was often in the form of a family heirloom that we might describe as a tiara. In other words, what we have in the second story is basically we have a woman who has lost her engagement ring. Why do you think she turns the house upside down? I mean, if you dropped a quarter in between the seams of your couch, you'd say, "Ah, we'll get it later." But ladies, if your diamond dropped out of its setting, I know exactly what you'd do, you would shred the couch to get to it, and that's exactly what we have take place.

Then we have the prodigal, we have this young man. By the way, the Bible is very specific when Jesus tells the story, he is the youngest of the two, demands his inheritance. He decides to go out and spend it all, live it all, and I love what the Bible says, in riotous living. We discover that he's actually in the same position as the sheep, is he not? He's in a place he has no business being, doing things he has no business doing, and we discover that like the sheep was filthy and dirty, where is he? I don't know a whole lot about pig

farming but it's not very clean, is it? There he is feeding the swine. There he is in the literal mud of life.

You know, if I were writing the story and I didn't write the story, it's the Lord's story, the story would be over. I mean, after all, I mean, this is kind of the climax, right? We've proved our point. We had a sheep, we had an engagement ring, now we've got a human being that has been found. But it's almost as if if you've ever gone to a movie, if you've ever gone to some type of screen show where you think it has come to an end but it has not. All of a sudden the story has this incredible climax. "Bring out the robe. Bring out the ring. Get the fatted calf. Throw a party." That should be the end of the story but all of a sudden the older brother is brought into the mix. Here's a guy who's squeaky clean. Here's a guy who claims to have never betrayed his father or anything therein.

Do you find it interesting that the plot matches the people who were there? The first group, publicans and sinners. What's the first story? A dirty sheep. Is that not who they were perceived as being? What's the second group? Pharisees and scribes. What's the second story? An engagement ring, valuable, important, precious. What's the third story? It's about a son who's gotten dirty in life, much like the publicans and the sinner. But there's that fourth story about a son who appears to be clean but as we're going to see in just a moment, is just as lost as his little brother. You see, I think one of the things that we need to remember on this day is no matter how you or others see yourself, whether you say I'm one of those publicans, or I'm one of those scribes, or I'm a part of the 95% in the middle, what we discover is that we all have two overriding qualities: we are valuable in God's eyes but we are filthy dirty with sin. That's who we are no matter what others think of us or what we think of ourselves.

So because of that, we need to reflect for a moment. We need to kind of look at ourselves in that proverbial spiritual mirror and say if this is who we are, no matter how we perceive ourselves, then that means each and every one of us down at the end of the day needs to respond like the prodigal. I love what verse 17 says, it says, "when he came to himself." Some of your Bibles will say, "he came to his senses." One of the things that I've heard in recent days and I'm sure you could echo it as well, one of the things that is incredibly uncommon is common sense. I don't know about you, but it just seems like that every time you turn around whether on a media platform or a personal conversation, it's as if people have no idea what they're really saying. They communicate information that contradicts itself just a few minutes later and they have no problem with it at all. What we need is to make a little sense.

You say, "Well, how does that happen in our lives? What does that mean to reflect upon that?" This young man who had wasted all of his living, had done some horrific things, at least had the sense to say, "I've got a problem." The problem is most of us don't have that much sense. Most of us spend more time trying to justify and rationalize why you should embrace my problem than saying, "You know what? I've got an issue. I've got a problem." You know, one of my favorite Christmas gifts that I got this year, it was a coffee mug, and for those of you that don't know, I drink coffee by the gallon, but nonetheless, it was a coffee mug that basically had a picture of a Christmas figure on it of

great cultural renown, had a Bible verse and said, "Don't worry, you're all naughty." I love that coffee cup because it's so true. We all are the prodigal son.

He comes to his senses. He quit fighting it. He quit justifying it. He quit rationalizing it. He said, "Do you know what? I just need to go back home." But this morning, I want to draw a parallel to the older son. We don't talk about him a whole lot, particularly when it comes to comparing him to his younger brother but we might discover that they're actually in the same boat, and when we talk about reflecting, you know that a mirror tells you the truth whether you like it or not. How many of you as the "calendar year" got in front of a mirror and said, "I need to shed a few"? I don't know about you but how many of you have ever been walking through a department store, taken a glance at a mirror and said, "Who is that old man there? Who is that?" Because we perceive ourselves oftentimes differently than we are, so let's just reflect for a moment and see if most of us aren't a whole lot more like this older brother than we want to give credit. By the way, they were in the same position. Notice that it said earlier the father gave them both their inheritance. You see, the younger brother couldn't get his inheritance without the older brother getting his first. They both had the money but there's some interesting parallels.

Parallel 1. Both of them were outside of the house. Isn't that interesting? Neither one of them was inside the house, and even though the older brother was so upset about where his younger brother was, he was in the exact same position, the only difference was he wasn't in the mud but he still wasn't in the house.

The second parallel is this: we know the younger brother had some problems, we know he needed to come to his senses, we know he wasn't thinking right, we know he needed to repent, but I've got proof the older brother had the same problem. Look in verse 29. If you've ever raised a child, get ready to go full-blown Baptistical on this, "And he answering said to his father," now this is a young man talking to his dad, "Lo," forgive the sarcasm but I have to do it, "these many years do I serve thee and I've never transgressed at any time." Liar, liar, pants on fire. Can you imagine your child coming and saying, "I don't know why you're so excited about him. I've never messed up. I'm perfect." You see, he's got the exact same problem his brother does, he just doesn't want to admit it. At least his brother had the common sense to say, "I'm in a mess." The older brother said, "No, I've got it all together. There's nothing wrong with me."

But there's one last parallel. We find it in verse 30, it says, "But as soon as this," this is what he's telling his dad, "as soon as this your son has come," listen to this next statement, "which has devoured your living with harlots." Can I ask a very important question here? How did he know? Have you thought about that? The brother just got back. They did not have text messaging or email back then. How did he know? I'll tell you how he knew because he was right there with him. They both got the money. They both were outside of the house. The only difference is this brother had twice as much as his younger brother. He was able to "get out of the mud." The problem was he couldn't get out of the problem and here's what I want you to hear: the prodigal son is the publican and the sinner, the older brother is the Pharisee and the scribe. Let me give you a

definition of a Pharisee. A Pharisee is no different than a sinner, the only difference is they have enough money and friends to cover their mess.

He's in the same situation as his brother. He's outside the house. The Pharisees were outside the father's house. The Pharisees claimed, "I'm perfect," yet we know they had sinned. The Pharisees claimed that they did no ill, yet remember the story of the woman caught in adultery? It should have been the couple that was caught in adultery. So at the end of the day, what we discover is that we may identify more with the publican and/or the Pharisee but at the end of the day really Jesus has taken this entire scope of humanity and led us to reflect and say this is who we are which means we ought to relish in the grace of God. The word "grace," we've sung about it much this service by simple definition means to gain that which you do not deserve.

Now I want you to go back in the story and I want you to see something in verse 20. It's back to the prodigal. It says, "When he arose, he came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, had compassion and ran." The father actually runs to the prodigal. But I want you to go down to verse 28. This is the older brother, "And he was angry and he would not go in, therefore came his father out and entreated him." The story of the prodigal, that's the only picture that we have in your Bible of God ever getting in a hurry, the only time that God ever runs anytime is when there is a sinner who has repented of their sin and he is there to rejoice and to celebrate about the goodness of his grace. But we also see in this story that that which was not willing to repent, that which was saying I'm good enough, I don't need you, he still entreated him, he still begged him, he pleaded with him.

So today we look back on a year of headlines, stories, and experiences. We're looking forward to we have no idea based on years past. But at the end of the day, you see at the end of the day it doesn't matter how long the pandemic lasts, at the end of the day it doesn't matter how unstable society gets, at the end of the day all of us are those who are listening to this message, all of us the Lord is entreating, he's begging, he's pleading, he wants to give to us that which we don't deserve. It's called grace and it's rightfully described as amazing.

Did the prodigal deserve the robe? No. Did he deserve the ring? Absolutely not. Did he deserve a party to be thrown in his favor? No. But neither did the older brother and the dad was willing to give to both. So at the end of the day the real question is: have you recognized your sin condition or are you still the older brother saying, "Nah, I'm good enough"?