

A Kingdom Full of Joy

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Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0 : 00] But we're going to turn to our Bibles now, to Luke's Gospel, and Josh is back with us. And we're going to be looking at Luke chapter 15 and part of chapter 16 this morning.

So reading together then from Luke chapter 15 and verse 1, if you need a Bible, don't have one, there's some at the sides, the red Bibles at the front, at the back. Do go and get hold of one of those if you don't have one of your own.

And on those Bibles, I think it's page 874. Luke chapter 15 then and reading at verse 1. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. So he told them this parable. What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he's lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it.

When he's found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home and calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I find my sheep that was lost. Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

[1 : 22] Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

And when she's found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, rejoice with me, for I found the coin that I'd lost. Well, just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

And 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 the property that's 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 he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he'd spent everything, a severe famine arose in the country.

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.

[2 : 34] And no one gave him anything. 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'll arise and go to my father and I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm 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've sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his 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 all eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.

[3 : 39] And they began to celebrate. Now his oldest 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've served you and I never disobeyed your command.

And yet you gave me. 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 fattened calf for him.

And he said to him, Son, you are always with me. And all that is mine is yours. It was fitting. Or rather, we must celebrate and be glad.

[4 : 50] For this your brother was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found. He also said to the disciples, There was a rich man who had a manager and charges were brought to him that this man was wasting his possessions.

And he called him and said to him, What's this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager. The manager said to himself, What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me?

I'm not strong enough to dig and I'm ashamed to beg. I've decided what to do so that when I'm removed from management, people may receive me into their houses. So summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, How much do you owe my master?

He said, A hundred measures of oil. He said to him, Take your bill, sit down quickly, and write fifty. And he said to another, How much do you owe?

And he said, A hundred measures of wheat. He said to him, Take your bill, write eighty. And the master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness.

[6 : 04] For the sons of the world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you into eternal dwellings.

One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much. And one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust you with the true riches?

And if you have not been faithful in what is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or will he be devoted to the one and despise the other?

You cannot serve God and money. Amen. And may God bless to us his word and help us to understand his message for us today.

We'll do open your Bibles once again to Luke chapter 15 and 16. Jesus' kingdom is a kingdom full of joy.

[7 : 37] It is a joy that will last forever, a joy that will be marked wonderfully and finally at the great banquet of the last day. But it is also a joy that begins here and now in this life.

That is why, verse 1, sinners and tax collectors were drawing near to Jesus. But we've seen in our last couple of studies in Luke's gospel, some of the reasons that people will miss out on the glorious heavenly banquet.

And the message of this whole section today is that if the very things that mark out Jesus' kingdom here and now in this life, if his gracious salvation isn't a source of joy here and now, if there isn't a deep and profound joy in seeing God's grace touching the lives of others, then Jesus may explain that once again, exclusion will be the outcome ultimately for you when it comes to the day of the great banquet.

An exclusion that is based upon a loathing of others receiving from God what you deem they don't deserve. Last time we saw people excluded for not valuing the banquet enough.

That's in chapter 14. But here the exclusion will be because you think the banquet is too good for some. And so it taints any association that you might have with it. And so here, verses 15, chapter 15, verses 1 and 2, we see the Pharisees grumbling about Jesus' association with tax collectors and sinners.

[9 : 20] But look at the contrast. Verse 1, Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to Jesus, knowing that they needed his help, his grace. Drawing near because they could see that even here and now in this world, they could taste of the joy of Jesus' kingdom.

They could eat and have a taste of the great banquet that was to come. But verse 2, the Pharisees, what do they do? They grumble. Jesus receives sinners and eats with them.

Well, yes. Yes, he does. Now, tax collectors were the most reviled sinners in Israel.

They collected money, very often dishonestly, to fund the occupation of the promised land by a foreign nation. And often, the word used for sinner there in Luke's Gospels in reference to prostitution and the like.

And so the picture here is of Jesus sitting down with the absolute worst swindlers around. The Pharisees couldn't bear that Jesus would spend time with people like that.

[10 : 26] But inadvertently, their grumbling prompts what could be a tagline for Jesus' mission. Jesus receives sinners and eats with them.

Not to affirm their immorality, but to graciously offer his transforming power as he calls them to repentance. Jesus receives sinners and eats with them.

Precious words. He did so in his earthly ministry, and he intends to do so at the last day around his banqueting table. This man gloriously, wondrously, joyfully receives sinners and eats with them.

But whilst these words are precious to those who are aware of their need, of their lack, their sin, these same words are always an affront to the self-righteous and the proud, to the sanctimoniously religious, who cannot bear the idea that those who may be worse than them might receive God's grace just as they do.

Grace is the great leveler, and some people will just not tolerate that. Well, as we dive into this chapter, these chapters, it's important to notice that this whole passage holds together as a single parable.

[11 : 47] Notice verse 3, Jesus' response to the grumbling of the Pharisees is to tell a parable that extends not just to the Pharisees, but to the disciples then in chapter 16 along the same lines.

And so we see in these verses, Jesus' response is to show, firstly, a Savior whose rescue prompts rejoicing. A Savior whose rescue prompts rejoicing in verses 7 to 24.

Verses 4 to 24, sorry. When God graciously rescues people, it is a cause of great rejoicing. Rejoicing here and now, rejoicing in heaven, and rejoicing in eternity.

His is a kingdom marked by joy over repentant sinners. And that's the thrust of these opening verses. Each example, whether it be the sheep, the coin, or the sons, begins with lostness, lostness, then there's recovery, and finally rejoicing.

So let's look at each of these three aspects. First, lostness. Jesus paints a picture of the predicament that mankind faces when they are cut off from God and spiritually lost. And in doing so, he's drawing a line between the tax collectors and sinners who are drawing near to Jesus and the lost things in the parable.

[13 : 02] Verse 4, there's a lost sheep. This is a picture of helplessness. Sheep on their own, cut off from a shepherd, are helpless.

They're prey to the wolves. But more than that, sheep without a shepherd, that's a powerful biblical image, beginning in numbers and running throughout the Bible.

And perhaps most significantly, we find it in Ezekiel 34, we read about God condemning the bad shepherds for feeding only themselves because they feel to tend to the weak. They've left them like sheep without a shepherd.

The vulnerable, straying, lost sheep. And because of all of that, God passes a condemnation on them. The sheep have been scattered, become food for the wild beasts, and the shepherds are condemned.

Life without the Lord Jesus is a picture of helplessness, lostness. But also, the coin, verse 8.

[14 : 05] We see a lost coin as something that ceases to be useful. A coin's primary purpose is to have value that can be exchanged, but a lost coin has no value, does it? It can't be spent. Now, a coin also carries an image, doesn't it?

Jesus later on talks about rendering to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and he's talking about a coin that bears Caesar's image. And Jesus is using a coin to illustrate people.

And so I think his point is perhaps that as people bear the image of God, when they are lost, when their life is devoid of Jesus, then they cease to be useful.

It is life that is devoid of all that it was intended for. So helplessness, uselessness. And finally, the son, from verse 12, lostness, life without Jesus, is a deeply personal betrayal of a loving father.

The son wants his inheritance now. He doesn't care about this father. And when people go that way, taking what God has graciously given them, life itself even, and when they disappear off to the far country, as this son does, verse 13, to squander those riches, look at what it leads to.

[15 : 18] The far country, life away from God without Jesus, it's a place, verse 14, where there is no security. A famine arose. Riches prospering in this world can just as quickly turn to famine and dire need.

No security, but also, verse 16, no sympathy. He's reduced to feeding pigs and he's desperate to eat what they eat. And yet nobody gives him anything.

Jesus paints a picture here of lostness and it's a picture of instability heading to a place marked by famine and forsakenness. But it's also a picture of isolation.

Cut off from real community that can support and help and care. And cut off from our loving creator, the father whom we've scorned.

We need to grasp that. Whether we've come to the Lord Jesus or whether we've never come to the Lord Jesus or whether we're doubting his goodness right now, perhaps toying with ignoring him, heading off to the far country in some way, wondering about pursuing a relationship that we know isn't right, preparing ourselves to cave in to temptation in some matter, perhaps wanting to return to a previous life, to toy again with a substance we've relied on previously.

[16 : 36] Well, the picture here is that life away from Jesus is a lost life. It's rocky and it's remote. But notice verse 14.

Amidst all of this, this son began to be in need. And that's always the beginning of hope. That is what Jesus works with. And so Jesus makes clear that the far country isn't too far because we see secondly recovery.

Jesus takes the initiative when it comes to salvation. He goes to great lengths to rescue and recover those who are lost. And that's what is present again in all three of these pictures.

Verse 8. The lamp is lit, the whole house is swept, and the coin is searched for diligently until it's found. Jesus' initiative. Verse 4.

The shepherd goes in search of the one lost sheep. Notice he even leaves the 99 to go in search of the one. He searches until he finds it. Now, one sheep out of a hundred doesn't seem to be that big of a deal.

[17 : 41] Certainly not worth risking the whole flock over. From a business perspective, as an investment, it just doesn't really make sense, does it? But here is Jesus' point. The Pharisees don't think that his salvation makes sense.

They grumble at it. But the reality is, Jesus is exactly the sort of Savior who goes out of his way to save individuals. In his kingdom, that is the normal thing to do.

Jesus cares about individuals. Back to Ezekiel 34. After God condemns the terrible shepherds who had abused the sheep and left them shepherdless, God promises to shepherd his people himself.

Listen to Ezekiel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.

That is the way it is in Jesus' kingdom. In his economy, saving the lost will always be on the agenda, no matter the cost. And in Jesus' kingdom, his grace doesn't just rescue, his grace will, will carry, will lead the lost home.

[18 : 54] Verse 5, he finds the lost sheep, he throws it over his shoulder, and he heads home to rejoice. But we must see clearly that whilst God takes the initiative in salvation, nonetheless, it does always require repentance.

Do you see verse 7? He's talking about repentant sinners. And we see the same thing so clearly with the Father and the Son. The Son comes to himself, he realizes that he's erred terribly.

Verse 17, he recalls the goodness of his father's house. Verses 18 and 19, he recognizes that he's sinned terribly against his father, and he's going back to confess it.

Rescue always originates through God's initiative, but it always comes through repentance. And as he works out his repentance, as the Son heads back, as he goes to his father to admit his grievous error, look again at the initiative that God takes.

Verse 20, whilst this renegade son, this rebel, this treacherous son, who is good as wished his father dead, whilst this son was still a long way off, his father had compassion, and he runs to his son, embraces him and kisses him.

[20 : 10] The father shrugs off decorum, and runs to greet his lost son. That pictures the scandal of grace. It doesn't make sense. It will cause some to have a sense of shock.

What did he do? But that is the way of Jesus' kingdom. He bears the cost of recovering lost sons. And so much so, that he even makes it that, verse 22, we don't come to God as slaves, but as sons.

Bring the robe. Bring the ring. Here is my son. This is a picture of divine condescension that has happened.

This is a picture of the divine condescension that has happened in the incarnation. God, in the person of Jesus, has accommodated himself to reach out to lost humanity, to run toward them, to bring recovery.

God has stepped down and stooped down to make the lost his sons. And in the face of this, there's only one possible response. When Jesus is the sort of savior who goes out of his way to rescue the one, when he takes delight in his rescue, then all that is truly fitting is, and thirdly, rejoicing.

[21 : 28] Salvation being worked out is always a cause of joy. The sheep returns. In verse 5, there's rejoicing. Verse 6, the shepherd assembles his friends and rejoices with them that one of his sheep has been found.

Verse 7, just so I tell you that there'll be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Notice Jesus paints a picture of great and glorious rejoicing.

Rejoicing over individuals. Not cohorts, not groups. Individuals. You. Me.

That's a picture of joy that's public and shared. We might think that when we come to Jesus, when he's rescued us from a dark past, that maybe our story is one that's perhaps best not told for all that we've done.

Maybe these tax collectors and sinners that were drawn to Jesus were ashamed to mention how Jesus had saved them because of what he'd rescued them from. But we need to see, Jesus says, every individual he's rescued is a trophy of grace, is a reason for rejoicing in the heavens.

[22 : 39] It mightn't bring rejoicing on earth. It may prompt grumbling. But verse 10, every individual he has rescued is something that is put on display to the angels for them to marvel at.

The angels watch on in wonder at what Jesus has done in your life and in my life. They know about the work of grace that has moved us from death to life.

And this joy over God's grace finds its expression in verse 23, once again, in a feast, a banquet.

Bring the fattened calf. Jesus' message here is that his great banquet, the wonderful feast of the last day, is going to be a feast of celebration that has all manner of repentant sinners at it.

Jesus' work of salvation, his appeal to the tax collectors and sinners, is a cause of real and genuine rejoicing. Because verse 24, Jesus' work of salvation is nothing short of bringing life from death, seeing many who were lost find.

[23 : 55] That is why sinners were drawing near to Jesus throughout his earthly ministry, because they could see and tell that such joy and rejoicing could begin today in his presence.

As his summons to repentance comes at the same time with his gracious transformation. And it still can. Drawing near to Jesus comes with the assurance that he receives sinners and eats with them.

What joy! But of course, that isn't the end of the parable, is it? Because secondly, there is a sting for the self-righteous in verses 25 to 32.

A sting for the self-righteous. Jesus warns us that griping about grace is a surefire sign that we haven't really experienced it.

Verse 7, notice the phrase about the 99 who don't need to repent. I take it that that is an ironic comment directed at these very Pharisees who grumble at Jesus.

[25 : 03] They don't think they need to repent. They're a bit like the tax collector in chapter 18 who beats his chest mourning over sin. He's clear on what his need is.

But the Pharisees watch on and say, thank the Lord. This parable could end at verse 24 and it would give wondrous and joyous explanation to Jesus receiving sinners and eating with them.

But Jesus, as he often does, is challenging the very revealing attitude of the Pharisees. And so here's the sharp edge of this parable. Thus far, we've had the stories of a found sheep, a found coin, and a found son.

But now Jesus exposes the Pharisees as those who are really lost. As he lines them up with the older son who's the lost one.

Verse 25, the older son comes in from work and hears music and dancing. Verse 26, he asks about the occasion. He hears that his brother is back safe and sound and so the fattened calf is killed.

[26 : 09] In verse 28, he rejoices. Oh no, he doesn't. He's angry, furious. He wants no part of this celebration.

Notice he has no concern for his brother. He doesn't care that he's safe and sound. No, instead, he only has complaints about how his brother has been treated. Verse 30, notice the language again.

This son of yours, he's not my brother, he's a son of yours. He has plundered our inheritance with prostitutes and you celebrate. Look at his plea, verse 29, all these years I've slaved for you.

That's what the word literally means, I've slaved for you. I've slaved and slaved. What do I deserve? I haven't even got a little goat for me and my friends.

Notice his idea of celebrating isn't celebrating with his father. He's disgusted at this celebration because of what it means for him. This cheapens my inheritance.

[27 : 14] This cheapens my many years of slaving for you, for your house. No joy, only judgment. It must be said that grace is scandalous.

It is outrageous. And it is, by definition, by definition, unfair. But the telltale sign of someone who doesn't get Jesus' kingdom, doesn't belong in Jesus' kingdom, is this kind of superiority that despises how God has been at work in someone else.

That despises the transformation, the growth, the ministry of someone else who takes the shine off of us. What we see here is that grace is not a word in the Older Brothers dictionary.

It's not an idea that's familiar to him. That's Jesus' diagnosis for these Pharisees. They do not understand grace because they haven't experienced it. They haven't been able to prise themselves off of the important seats to stoop down to the lowest place, the place of wholehearted repentance, the place of seeing their own weakness and feeling, to see the reality that would be fair would be for them to be judged just as much as everyone else.

The older brother doesn't recognize his own need, his own position. Verse 29, Look, these many years I've served you, I've never disobeyed your command. And not being able to see his own need goes hand in hand with not being able to see what is his.

[28 : 46] His brother has come back longing to be a servant but is received as a son. Whereas the older brother has always been a son but sees himself as a slave.

It sounds begrudging, doesn't it? He feels to grasp verse 31 that everything is his. Jesus' words are a challenge to all of us here.

There is something of the older brother lurking in all of us. But Jesus is warning us here, it's possible to grow up in the Father's house, it's possible to grow up in church, to have tasted the riches of it, to be in the orbit of people to whom belongs every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms.

But to scorn it, to treat it as a duty, not a delight, to feel beholden to God and not beloved of God, and to hold within ourselves a malice towards others who have ministries that we would love to have, to grow bitter about ways that others seem to be flourishing, recognized, to gripe at how your prayers aren't answered when everyone else seems to be blessed, to develop all manner of things that we stack up as making me righteous and me spiritual, me sound, me godly, to point out, oh, so easily how others err and feel, but of course, I'm above reproach, I'm very righteous, to find ourselves thinking or spouting that of course that chap over there, well, he couldn't ever have a ministry like mine, you see.

Don't you know he used to be an addict? Or looking down upon brothers and sisters for their deficient understanding of some matter of the Bible or theology, casting aspersions about brothers and sisters who gather to worship with us week after week, but of course they aren't worshipping properly, not like me.

[30 : 41] You see, I knew which hymns to sing and which ones we mustn't sing. I knew hundreds of verses off by heart, and they're all from the only authorized version. My prayers are long, theologically precise, and a million and one other lines that we can draw to separate us from those who just aren't as deserving of God's grace as we think we are.

But that's the whole point. As one preacher says, it's difficult for an older brother type to see that though he may prefer more classy sins, he is nevertheless in the same category as the whore hugger.

And until he begins to be in need, there's not much hope for him. And so what is all so evident in the kind of self-righteousness that hasn't received and grasped grace, in all of its scandalous wonder, what is so evident is a Scrooge-like attitude.

The characteristic of the Pharisaic older brother is joylessness. No celebration when his brother who was dead has brought back to life. No joy over the lost being found.

No joy when you look out at a church that is growing where young people are being disciplined towards godliness. Where groups of people are professing faith for the first time. Where hundreds of people are joyfully engaged in sacrificial service.

[32 : 02] No joy in the face of all of that. Only complaints. What about my service? What about my theological pedigree and purity? Jesus is telling us that the far country can be just as much the church pew as the pig pen.

Listen to Ralph Davis. What can be more tedious, boring, dull, dead, and damning than having all the motions of religion and evidence of morality without an enjoyable relation with God?

Friends, one's demeanor can reveal a lot about one's familiarity with grace. But even these words of challenge from Jesus, notice verse 28, even with these, the father goes out to meet both sons.

Listen to Ralph Davis again. Some sinners smell of the hog pen, but others reek of the church pew. And Jesus appeals to them as well. And he goes on, this man welcomes sinners.

The Pharisee's complaint is preaching good news. But the punchline of Jesus' parable preaches even better news to me, for it says, this man will even welcome Pharisees.

[33 : 24] Now, we aren't told what the older brother does, but it does beg the question, what will they do? How will we respond?

Well, Jesus concludes the father's words by saying, verse 32, that it was fitting. Well, actually, the word would be better translated, it is necessary to celebrate and be glad. Why?

Because resurrection has happened. Jesus in this parable confronts the Pharisees and us with the reality that some will miss out on the great banquet because they cannot stomach who else might be there.

If there's no joy now in seeing the fruit of grace in the lives of others, if that doesn't echo deeply in our hearts, if ours is to grumble instead of to be glad at God's grace, then how can we expect to be at the great celebration, the feast of all feasts, the marriage supper, where all repentant sinners will be gathered and Jesus' work of salvation will see its completion when he clothes his people with fine linen, bright and pure, so that sinners will be forever saints.

Well, thirdly, and finally, verses 1 to 13 of chapter 16, we see a shrewdness about eternal rewards, a shrewdness about eternal rewards.

[34 : 59] Jesus' true people are marked out by their lavish investment in relationships that will ripple into eternity. Verse 1, Jesus' parable continues now towards his disciples and he is painting a contrast.

The Pharisees are exposed over their grumbling and joyless resentment about God's grace. But Jesus now goes on to say that his true disciples, those who have encountered and experienced grace, on the other hand, they are those whose lives here and now are shaped by being lavishly committed to, verse 9, making friends for eternity.

Those who share God's joy at the rescuing of sinners, tasting of the grace of God, of the joy of the lost being found and the dead being brought to life, that will issue forth in a growing desire to see more and more people taste that joy.

It will issue forth in extravagantly using our means to bless others with the joy of his kingdom. Now, both chapters 15 and 16 deal with money, with riches, inheritances.

Both feature ideas of profligacy. Both are about entry into the Father's dwelling, an eternal dwelling, and both speak of sons. And so Luke means us to see that the message of these two chapters holds together.

[36 : 23] Luke wants us to see that this is still part of the parable he began, Jesus began to tell in chapter 15, verse 3. And so he is wanting to be clear that any would-be disciples who don't use yours, they aren't to use their resources like those in the far country, they're not to despise others receiving grace.

Indeed, they're to use resources to store up eternal blessings. Pour out what you have for the multiplication of joy that is experienced in Jesus' kingdom, now and forever.

And Jesus makes this point through this dishonest manager. And we need to be clear, Jesus here isn't commending this manager's morality, but rather his ingenuity, his acumen.

So verse 1, a rich man's manager is charged for wasting, for squandering possessions. And so the day of reckoning was coming, verse 2, turn in the ledger, your goose is cooked.

And so look at what happens, verse 3, there's a quandary. His job is going and he isn't up for real hard work and he's too proud to beg. And so verse 4, he resolves to make sure he'll always have houses to be welcomed in, tables to eat at, and a bed to sleep in.

[37 : 39] And he achieves this by verse 5, summoning the various debtors that his master has. And his last act as manager is to rewrite those ledgers. Verse 6, he shaves off half the debt for one.

The amount of oil that's estimated there is to be about three years worth of wages. A debt halved. Verse 7, debt of wheat, 20% of it's written off.

The total debt would have been about eight years worth of wages, serious sums of money. Here's the manager continuing to squander and waste resource.

Yes, dishonestly. But the point here is that he is profligate with his master's wealth in a way that secures his future. And so verse 8, here is the commendation.

Jesus' point, this manager was dishonest, yes, that's not the lesson to learn. He was dishonest, but shrewd. Indeed, Jesus says that this world is far more shrewd with its resource than the sons of light.

[38 : 44] Here was a manager who was told that a day of reckoning was coming, time was short, and his response was to take that reckoning very seriously and invest what he had to be delivered from it, to escape from it.

Let me be clear. Jesus isn't lauding the dishonesty. He's commending the discernment. And so Jesus' message, his application of this to any would-be disciples is verse 9, make friends for yourself that will welcome you into eternity.

And this is to be done through wealth, money, mammon. Now, money itself isn't unrighteous, it's neutral, but isn't it the case so often that money does corrupt?

The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And I think Jesus is simply saying here that his disciples ought to use this world's money, unrighteous money that is often the case, for eternal good.

Money that often ends up being corrupting, unrighteous, money that is often used for no good ends, be shrewd in using it for eternity. And here again is a picture of joy.

[40 : 00] Verse 9, make friends, invest in ways that see the gospel flourish in people's lives so that they may receive you into the eternal dwellings. Picture what it will be like to arrive at the last day and there waiting to greet you will be a bunch of people who were brought to faith through the ministry of someone you helped to fund.

as a ministry trainee. And they're thrilled to meet you because your generosity was the means of them being brought to life. Or the person who's there rejoicing and keen to welcome you because your generosity enabled a ministry that contended for the life of the unborn.

And your generosity meant this person kept their child, kept them alive, saw them grow, and that was the beginning of generations of a Christian family.

Or the people who were able to become courageous leaders in churches and families and society, joyfully welcoming you because you invested in Christian education and that rippled into eternity.

Or the Indian pastor who cannot wait to meet you because your money provided the legal help and counseling and support that meant his regular beatings for preaching the gospel.

[41 : 21] You helped him not give up. Your generosity encouraged him and kept him going. Listen to an example David Gooding gives here.

He writes, if when accounts are rendered it becomes known in heaven that it was your sacrificial giving that provided copies of John's gospel, say, which led to a whole tribe which led a whole tribe out of paganism to faith in Christ, will not that whole tribe show towards you an eternal gratitude which they won't show towards me who spent all my spare cash on luxuries for my own enjoyment?

If what we have in this life is clutched tightly only for me, if what brings us joy in this life is stuff, money, possessions, and property, then Jesus' words for us. He's commending an approach to our resources in this world that invests in eternity.

It isn't wrong to make money. We mustn't make it seem like making serious money in this world is some kind of evil or lesser calling, morally tainted in some way. No. If you're able to make truckloads of cash in a godly way, then that simply means even more opportunity to make friends for eternity.

That is to invest in ever-increasing joy by delighting to see more people encounter the saving grace of Jesus' kingdom. That's the right approach to money.

[42 : 50] But notice verse 9. That's right because a day is coming when it will ultimately fail. Worldly wealth will one day be dust. But what won't be dust is everyone who was lost but is now found.

Everyone who was dead but through Jesus has been brought to life. Everyone who's been spurred on, blessed, equipped, encouraged because of your lavish and thoughtful pouring out of your substance here and nigh.

And so notice Jesus' words for us are also to point out that those who cannot be faithful with a little won't be faithful with a lot. Verse 10. One who is faithful with very little is also faithful with much.

The little that Jesus is talking about is money. If we cannot be trusted with the money God has provided for us and it is from him, if we can't be trusted to generously and lavishly invest it in God's kingdom and God's people, then verses 11 and 12.

Why would you be entrusted with greater riches? If we cannot be trusted with that which will pass away, how can he entrust us the joy, the eternal joy of serving his people forever?

[44 : 11] And if that's the case, verse 13, Jesus is exposing that actually our real master in this world is not God but gold. We cannot serve both.

One can be a glorious means of doing the other, yes. Money can be used wonderfully in the service of God. But if we won't do that, if our money is for us and we hold it in a clenched fist and only ever consider giving what we feel we must to avoid a nagging conscience, then it might just be that we despise God.

You see, when we have grasped the wonders of grace, it's a joy to see that grace take hold of the lives of others. And that joy is multiplied, isn't it, when it's a joy that we've played a part in making it happen.

And so Jesus' message here is to tell us that if it is our real joy to know Jesus, to have been touched by his grace, it will be a delight to invest what we have, yes, our money and ourselves, and seeing others celebrating at that banquet and to be received by those we've blessed as they welcome us at the great feast of the last day.

Jesus says it was necessary to celebrate and be glad. For this, your brother was dead and he's alive. He was lost.

[45 : 39] He was found. And he says, rejoice with me. I have found my sheep that was lost.

Let's pray. Lord, in a world that tries to shape our desires and our aims and our aspirations in so many different ways, would you grant us your grace afresh to see with illumined eyes and hearts that there is no sweeter joy in this world than your saving grace at work to bring life from death.

And so, help us to have hearts and wallets ever changed and ever seeking this incorruptible joy.

Amen.