

The Perfect Joy of His Glorious Kingdom

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn this morning to our scripture reading and you'll find that in Luke's gospel at chapter 15. And if you have one of our church visitors Bibles, that is page 874, I think.

And we're going to read together the whole of chapter 15 and the first half of chapter 16, which all belongs together, actually, as one unit, as we shall see. 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. And so he told them this parable. What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the other 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

And when he's found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to him, Rejoice with me, for I've found my sheep that was lost.

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. 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?

[1 : 24] And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I've found the coin that I'd lost. 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 there he squandered his property in reckless living. When he'd spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of the country. He sent him into his field to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate.

No one gave him anything. But 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.

[2 : 29] I will arise and go to my father. And I will say to him, Father, I've sinned against heaven and before you. I am 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 all 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. 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 the music and dancing.

[3 : 26] And he called out to the servants and said, What do these things mean? And he said to him, Your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he 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 been slaving for you.

And I never disobeyed your command. 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. But it was necessary, essential to celebrate and be glad.

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, a steward, and charges were brought to him.

[4 : 40] That this man was squandering his possessions. They called him and said to him, What is this that I hear about you? Turn in the account of your management, for you can no longer be manager.

The manager, the steward, said to himself, What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I'm not strong enough to dig. 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 and sit down quickly and write fifty. Then he said to another, And how much do you owe? He said, A hundred measures of wheat.

He said to him, Take your bill and write eighty. The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness. For, says Jesus, the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light.

[5 : 47] And I tell you, Make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

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

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

You cannot serve God and mammon, money, earthly possessions. Amen.

May God bless to us this, his word. Well, do turn with me, if you would, to Luke's Gospel, chapter 15, page 874 in the Church Bibles.

[6 : 54] A passage all about the perfect joy of Christ's glorious kingdom. We're traveling with Jesus in his journey in the second part of Luke's Gospel, traveling with him on the road to heaven's glory.

And indeed, it is a path of great privilege and rejoicing. But of course, it's also a path of pain and rejection. It's the road to the cross, both for Jesus and, according to him, for every single one who would follow him.

And that's a repeated refrain through these chapters. Look at the very end of chapter 14 at verse 33. Any one of you that does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple, says Jesus.

So choices must be made. And cost must be borne in this world for everyone who will inherit the world to come.

And alas, as we've been discovering in these chapters, Jesus' message, his sad message, is that many refuse. And so Jesus warns every would-be disciple that you must be the real deal.

[8 : 05] Look at the end of chapter 14 again. We saw last time, anything that looks like salt but doesn't taste like salt, well, it just isn't salt. No point in calling it that.

It just needs to be thrown away. It's absolutely useless. It needs to be cast out. The same words Jesus uses in chapter 13 of those who will find themselves cast out from God's kingdom.

And many people, according to Jesus, who looked as though they're God's people, when they're put to the test, well, we find that they have a very different flavor, a very different fragrance from the real God of heaven, the God who is made known uniquely in Jesus, his son.

So here in chapter 15 and chapter 16 is a challenge, again, to those who profess to be religious and very spiritual, and also a challenge very specifically to those who profess to be Jesus' disciples.

And the challenge is this. Do you really share the flavor and the fragrance of the coming kingdom of Jesus? Because surely those who will be truly at home there, loving the culture and the ways of the Father's house, the Father's kingdom, surely those who will be at home there will already be animated by the very things that characterize the kingdom of heaven.

[9 : 29] Its joys will be their joys now already. And that will be very evident. I know exactly which of my friends will relish the coming Rugby World Cup this summer because they relish rugby already.

And they're mad keen on it. That excites them now. And I'm one of them, by the way. And just so, if you're somebody who hates the sunshine, if you're the sort of person who stays indoors even when the sunshine's in Scotland, then it's rather unlikely if one of your friends is organizing a summer holiday trip to Dubai in July that you're going to be going.

Forty degrees of heat just doesn't appeal to you, so you'll make excuses. You won't be excited by that. It's obvious. Well, according to Jesus, just so with those who are truly his.

His heavenly kingdom knows no greater joy than the perfect joy of rejoicing in rescue, in redemption of lost human beings.

People made in the image of God, but lost in sin and rebellion. And yet found and brought home through the grace of true repentance to join the joy of the Father's house.

[10 : 39] And his house is a house of abundant joy and overflowing grace. There's something terribly wrong, isn't there, with those who claim to know God, but don't recognize what God's greatest treasures are.

People rescued for eternity. It's an extraordinary thing if people have no interest in the redemption of lost people, and yet at the same time they seethe with resentment when they're faced with the prospect of lost possessions, treasures that will spoil and fade, things that are just temporary.

But according to Jesus, our attitude to our precious possessions and our attitude to God's precious people, and therefore to God himself, these things are intimately connected.

Either our possessions, mammon, as Jesus calls it famously here, either mammon is our servant, with which we are devoted in love, to serving God with what he gives us, and our possessions are devoted to God and his precious people, or, according to Jesus, mammon is actually our master, and we shall despise God's precious people, and therefore, in fact, we just show we're despising God himself.

Now, if it's the former, then nothing will thrill us more in life than to join the joy of the Father and rejoice to be prodigal, to be profligate with our possessions now by investing them in the heavenly joy in his glorious plan of redemption.

[12 : 23] But if it's the latter, if mammon is actually our master, then, alas, we will deprive ourselves, ultimately, of entry into the rejoicing of the world to come, and very likely, also, we'll consign ourselves to lives of bitterness and resentment now, all through this life.

And that's the choice that Jesus puts before us in these chapters. We're very familiar, of course, aren't we, with the stories of chapter 15, and we often take them separately. I'm sure we've many times heard messages preached on each one of these sections, but notice verse 3 of chapter 15.

It says, Jesus told them this parable. That means the whole of chapter 15 is just one parable in three parts. It all belongs together. And what's rarely noticed is that it also belongs with the first part of chapter 16 that we read, because immediately after this word, which is directed at the Pharisees, we read, he also said this to his disciples.

So chapter 15 is aimed at the Pharisees who grumbled Jesus associating with sinners, and it's chiefly a challenge to them. It's not actually primarily an evangelistic message to sinners, although that's how we often use it.

Of course, it is. It does have wonderful words of reassurance to those who have gotten a terrible mess in life and who know it, and who wonder if there possibly could be a way back for somebody like them. Yes, there can be, says this chapter.

[13 : 49] But the chief challenge is to those who have no idea that they're lost. But in fact, they are lost. In fact, they're even more hopelessly lost because they're still living within the Father's estate.

And yet they're very, very far away from the Father's heart and the Father's true home. So chapter 15 is directed at the Pharisees, but chapter 16 goes on immediately, as you see, to challenge Jesus' disciples also.

And what he's saying to them is, don't you be like that. And he tells this provocative parable about the dishonest steward to teach them how true sons of God, true sons of light, as Jesus calls them here, how they should live in the light of his coming kingdom of joy.

Not as foolish and reckless stewards of the possessions they get from their father, like the younger son, nor as faithless and resentful stewards of what they have from their father.

Like the elder son. But rather as faithful and resourceful stewards, recognizing what it means to invest wisely, to ensure a joyful reception and a lasting reward in the eternal dwellings of the great Redeemer and in the company of all his redeemed people.

[15 : 08] And if you look carefully between chapter 15 and chapter 16, you'll see that there are many links between these two. Both are concerned with wealth and possessions and with squandering it.

Both are about entry or non-entry in the end into the house, into the dwelling place. And both are actually about contrasting sons. The two sons in chapter 15 and then in chapter 16, in the sons of this world and the sons of light.

So Luke is clearly showing us that Jesus' message here is all connected. And I want us to see Jesus' big point here that Luke has preserved so carefully for us.

It means we'll have to skate over some of the very familiar details. But there is a danger, isn't there, in familiar Bible stories that we focus on what we already think they mean and what we think we know about them rather than actually looking fresh and seeing perhaps what is really important.

So let's try and look at these chapters with fresh eyes this morning. First of all, in verses 1 to 10, it's surely very plain, isn't it, that these are verses about recovery and rejoicing. The rejoicing of a wonderfully faithful God.

[16 : 14] These verses picture for us the deep joy of heaven in the redemption of lost sinners. Notice verse 2. Jesus aims what he says in this chapter at the grumbling scribes and Pharisees.

Now they're complaining with some reason. at the people that Jesus associates with because they were not at all savory people. It doesn't mean much to us, tax collectors and sinners, but these were very dishonest people who defrauded people for money.

They're just the sort of people who'd be exposed on watchdog, for example, as fleecing old people and defrauding them out of their pensions through scams. And the sinners are pimps and prostitutes, people who sexually exploit for money other people, young girls.

Think of all those ghastly people who were doing that in Rochdale and those terrible things recently. How would we feel if a friend of ours was sitting down to dinner with a bunch of those folk? And eating with people like that, you see, is an issue, actually, in the Bible.

When you read the New Testament, Paul in Corinthians is very clear, isn't it? He says, you're not to eat with people like that if by doing so within the church you're legitimizing their behavior.

[17 : 33] But of course, that's the point, isn't it? Because Jesus was not for a minute legitimizing these people's behavior. He was constantly challenging them and exposing these people, rebuking their way of life.

And many of these people knew that they needed rescuing from that life. They knew it was a sick life. It's the sick who need a doctor, says Jesus.

And if he's coming to see you, well, that's rather an insult, don't you think? I haven't come to call a righteous, but sinners to repentance is what Jesus was always saying.

So he is not for a moment living it up with these people and saying, oh, your lifestyle's fine. I accept you just as you are. No, what Jesus was saying to these people was turn right away from everything you're doing and follow me now.

Change. True grace, you see, in the gospel of Christ is not immoral. It works change. The true gospel works a radical change in lifestyle.

[18 : 39] And the thing is, these people were being changed very wonderfully from these ghastly lives. But the scribes and the Pharisees just couldn't accept that and they didn't like it.

To them, you see, like to many people, they just say, well, a leopard doesn't change its spots. That's what we say, isn't it? We don't really believe people can change. And so instead of rejoicing at lives that were genuinely being changed, they rejected the whole idea of that kind of ministry of Jesus.

They would rather leave people lost and broken and twisted and evil than rejoice in a real gospel of grace that can actually transform people.

And that's always the mark of a false gospel, isn't it? One that leaves people unchanged in their sin, whether it's by rejecting them or whether it's just by affirming them and saying, oh no, our gospel tells you you can carry on living and do what you like.

It's always the mark of a false gospel. But you see, God and his household rejoice at the lost being found. They rejoice in the twisted being made straight.

[19 : 48] They rejoice in the rescue of those who otherwise are heading for hell. And that's the simple point that's made by these two stories in verses 1 to 10 about the Father's house.

Because human beings created in the image of God are so valuable to God, he will go to extraordinary lengths to recover them. And when he does, he rejoices greatly with all his household of heaven.

So verse 4, a lost sheep is very valuable. It's part of this man's wealth. But notice, it's only 1% of his wealth. And yet it's of such value that he leaves all the rest to go and recover it.

And then he asks everyone to come and join in celebrating. And a lost coin in verse 8. It's one of 10. 10% of her wealth, just one day's wages, the footnote tells us.

That's important. It's not such a big deal. And yet, the whole house is put under the searchlights until it's found. And again, a great shared celebration of joy.

[20 : 50] And just so, says Jesus, twice, verse 7 and verse 10, just so, I tell you, there is joy in heaven. Joy among the angels of God's household over one sinner who repents, over one lost soul who is found and rescued and restored for eternity.

Notice all the emphasis in these stories is on the one who does the searching. It represents the truth, doesn't it? A sheep is helpless. A sheep's stupid. It can't find itself.

It represents so clearly the pathetic, the helpless aspect of human sin. A sheep needs finding. Likewise, a coin. A coin is inert.

A coin can't even bleep like a sheep to tell you where it's lost. For all the face value on that coin, it is absolutely worthless, isn't it? Down the back of a sofa or in the corner of a room.

It needs to be brought back into circulation if it's going to function at all as the valuable thing it was created to be. But in both cases, you see, it's the rescuer alone who must do what is necessary to redeem what's lost.

[22 : 04] It's all his initiative. It's his grace and compassion alone that brings rescue. But notice again, verse 7 and verse 10, grace is not immoral.

It's not without repentance, says Jesus, that a sinner is received and rescued. Not without a real turning, a real humbling, a real transformation. But of course, a sheep can't repent and a coin can't repent and that's why we have the third part of Jesus' parable that shows us what true repentance really means, what it looks like.

Whatever your lostness, whether it's the lostness of the obvious renegade or the apparently orthodox righteous, there must be a response to the love and to the compassionate and consistent searching from the one who comes to seek and to save what is lost.

That's why Jesus goes on in verses 11 to 32 to speak about the response to his father's great compassion. And these verses are all about repentance and refusal.

And particularly the refusal of willfully faithless humanity that often simply cannot rejoice in grace being offered to the undeserving.

[23 : 23] It's a picture, isn't it, of two lost sons and of man's response to the compassion of a wonderfully gracious father in heaven. Now notice again, despite what we often call this story, the prodigal son, that the real focus, again, just like the first ten verses, is on the wonderful patience and grace and compassion of this totally misunderstood and maligned father.

Look at the incredible attitude that this man extends even to a wicked son, a son who just wants rid of him. In fact, he really just wishes he was dead. That's what verse 12 means really.

Give me what's in your will. You just haven't died quickly enough for me. Want it now. Never mind Mr. Osborne's new inheritance text promises. I just want the money now.

I'll take the hit. That's what he's saying. It's outrageous. And yet, this extraordinarily generous father gives so much, so many good things, even to a son like that.

And later on, after the son's folly and ruin, his heart is still full of such love and compassion. Look at verse 20. He literally races to embrace him again and take him back.

[24 : 38] It's an extraordinary picture of forgiving grace, is it not? Then look at verse 28. How he pleads with his raging older son. He's furious with him because of what he's done.

But the father comes out to beg him, to entreat with him, urging him not to miss out on the joy of his household of love and mercy. It's a picture, isn't it?

It's an unmissable picture of the extraordinary, wonderful grace of God which is made known to all mankind in the person of his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And yet Jesus pointedly shows us two very different reactions that human beings make to this wonderful news, to this gospel of his grace. And we see that in this story of the two sons.

First, we see the repentance of a rebellious son. One lost son is lost through foolish, reckless stewardship of what's given him by his father. And yet he is truly repentant in the end.

[25 : 43] And he enters himself at last into the perfect joy of the true home of the father's house. He enters the joy of the redeemed. What the youngest son wants in verse 12 is independence, autonomy.

He's got a totally wrong view of his father. And he's got a totally selfish attitude. He doesn't want his father. He doesn't want a relationship with him. He just wants what he has and what he can get.

And he wants it now for himself. That's just what Adam demanded, wasn't it, in the Garden of Eden? Autonomy. I want it, and I want it now my way.

I'll have what's mine, and I'll do it my way. That's the song of humanity, isn't it? Frank Sinatra's song, I'll do it my way. It's a lot older than you think. It's been sung in this world since the very dawn of humanity.

So the youngest son goes off to find himself his own way. That's something we hear all the time still today, isn't it? We talk about finding our identity.

[26 : 44] People need to find out who they really are. And of course, to do that, what we think we need to do is throw off every trace of, well, the father's house.

The restrictiveness, the repressiveness of our background that have accepted morality and so on. That whole idea is endemic in our society today. That's why there's such a shrill lobby increasingly against any kind of teaching of traditional Christian morality, for example, in our schools.

It's dangerous indoctrination. It's repressive. Young people must be free to find themselves their own way. We promote that now so widely.

And so we encourage young people even to experiment. Find out who they are by experimentation with all kinds of extraordinary lifestyles, especially in our days experimenting with different sexual lifestyles.

It's all through our society today. Mr. Blair, remember when he was Prime Minister, made it his mantra, throwing off the shackles of conservatism. He didn't just mean conservative politics, of course.

[27 : 53] He meant largely the traditional historic Christian values that our country was built on. Perhaps there's a place for a documentary or two, by the way, about what pre-Christian pagan values really look like in these British Isles.

That would be interesting, wouldn't it? Before the Christian faith banished things like child sacrifice and lawless barbarity and cruelty and wanton rape and pillage and even cannibalism and these sort of things.

Wouldn't it be great to get back to that? You see, it's so convenient, isn't it, to keep this idea of God and his ways and his patterns before us as something oppressive, something burdensome, something that we need to throw off in order to find liberty and find ourselves.

That's what the young son thought, and off he went to find liberty. But of course, as so often, it all ended in tears as it still does today. And in seeking to find himself, he loses himself.

What a pitiful picture it is there in verse 16. And only then, verse 17, did he come to himself. He realized at last how wrong he was.

[29 : 09] The father, he had convinced himself was such a tyrant, so restrictive. Well, in fact, he was a truly merciful and generous man who treats his servants as if they were sons.

But here he is, the true son, and he's nothing more than a slave. And so he humbles himself and confesses his sin, and he decides to go and seek to try and be a servant, a lowly servant in his father's house.

By the way, you'll hardly find anywhere in the New Testament, anywhere in the Bible, a better description of repentance than you see here in verses 17 to 20. He came to himself, verse 17, and he came back to his father, humbly confessing his sin and his helplessness.

And if you, yourself here today, do recognize yourself somehow in this young son, and you know that you need yourself again to get right with God, then this is exactly what you need to do.

You need to come to yourself, come to your senses about how foolish it was to listen to the world's siren voices promising you freedom and joy by doing it your way and doing it their way.

[30 : 23] Come to yourself and your senses. But don't stop there. That's not enough. Remorse is not enough. You need to come back to the only one who really can help you and restore you.

And look at the astonishing welcome that this son receives, verse 20. Before his words are out, the father has embraced him and kissed him and clothed him, put a ring on his finger, and the celebration has begun.

He enters the household of perfect joy. Joy, verse 24, in the lost being found, in the dead, coming back to life. And friends, what a truly wonderful message that is for any today who knows that they've messed up big time in life.

If this son can be saved, then any lost son, any vile and hateful sinner will come to himself and will come back to the father by listening to Jesus.

Any can receive that welcome. That's the message of these words. This chapter really is a wonderful encouragement to turn back to God. And it's a great assurance of the welcome that you will receive if you turn back to God.

[31 : 40] But as I said, the chief message of the story is for the scribes and the Pharisees, for the religiously orthodox, not actually for the scandalous sinner. And that's why Jesus comes to his climax with the elder brother.

And what we see pictured here is the refusal of a resentful son. He has another lost son, but one who is lost through faithless and resentful stewardship of what's been given to him by the father.

But he refuses the father's grace and he excludes himself from the perfect joy of the father's house and the company of the redeemed. See, what verses 25 to 30 reveal to us about the elder brother is that he is just as lost, but it's worse because he doesn't realize it for a moment.

He rightly sees his brother's shocking and scandalous, sinful attitudes, but he doesn't see the shocking sinfulness of his own heart, that he's just as much in the wrong.

The younger brother is prodigal, profligate, extravagant in spending for himself. But he is just as prodigal, just as profligate, enslaving for himself.

[32 : 55] He's just as self-centered as his younger brother. He says in verse 29, all these years, literally, I've been slaving for you. But the truth is, he makes it clear, he's not been slaving for his father, it's all for himself.

He wanted the party, he wanted the fatted calf, and he's resentful that he hasn't had it. He hasn't even had a kid, he says, for his friends. And he is just as wrong in his judgment of his father as his younger brother.

Because he too obviously thinks that his father is a slave master, a harsh taskmaster, that to serve him is to be a slave. It's just that instead of running away, he sees with resentment at home.

There's not a sign anywhere that he shares his father's love and grace. Don't you care about your brother's redemption? That's what he's being asked in verse 27.

His answer is, no, he doesn't. He doesn't even acknowledge him in verse 30 as a brother. It's just this son of yours. He's totally out of kilter with his father.

[34 : 05] He's out of kilter with the whole household that's rejoicing. How could he truly love his father but hate the brother whom his father loved so dearly?

And so he refuses to enter. He couldn't stand being at a banquet where you simply are enjoying the gracious benevolence and generosity of a father to all in the household.

But it's not because of me and my labors who have earned this. Far less could he celebrate an utterly undeserving degenerate sinner like his brother joining in.

That's the attitude that we have a name for isn't it? We say it's just human nature and that's right isn't it?

And human nature is the heart of the religious mindset. Here is the religious Pharisees who are in Jesus' sights and they simply do not understand the gracious heavenly father at all.

[35 : 13] They thought he was a slave driver. They're all focused on rules and obedience and not upon a relationship with this God of grace. The obedience to them was all mercenary.

They were obeying not out of love for a heavenly father not to honor him and not to rejoice his heart but they were obeying to gain honor for themselves just like the elder brother. He hated his brother's profligacy and he hated his father's but here's the thing God is profligate and prodigal.

God does waste his substance on undeserving sinners in ways that are utterly scandalous. You see again how just like in verses 1-10 the overwhelming focus is on the extraordinary grace and mercy of God the patient seeker of the lost.

But you see the forceful question to every one of us were within the father's household. The question is this do we really know the father?

Do we know what he really likes? What he really loves? And do we love what he really loves? And whom he loves? And how he loves them?

[36 : 35] Could we possibly be like the elder brother? Friends here's the truth by nature every one of us is like the elder brother. And we need to make sure that those natural attitudes don't bubble up in our lives because ultimately what Jesus is saying that kind of heart cannot belong in the kingdom of perfect joy.

We need to be careful is what Jesus is saying. Careful when we get angry about others who seem far less deserving than we are. But they're the ones given perhaps a place of honor or some note or some responsibility in church that we're not.

We need to be careful when we get resentful and we say to ourselves look what I've been doing for so long and what have I got to show for it whoever notices or praises me. We get resentful when others seem to have things that we don't or we get irritated when other people's prayers seem to be answered and ours aren't.

We find ourselves getting cross even in our own church because it's getting too big and it's too busy and there's all sorts of new people and they're not my kind of people. Maybe they're foreign people or people I don't really like the look of too much.

Or when we just get disappointed with God because we haven't had the answers to our prayers that other people seem to have had to theirs and we really feel when truth is told that if anybody deserves answer to prayers it's me and not him.

[38 : 12] We need to be careful. We who are sons of the light says Jesus disciples we need to be very careful not to become like the elder brother faithless and resentful stewards of the life that God has given us nor of course are to become like the younger son foolish and reckless stewards but no we are to be faithful and resourceful stewards of all life's possessions which are from the father and of course to be used for the father and therefore for his great joy that's how we will find the reward of true grace and that's how we will enter the rejoicing of great joy the joy of heaven that's why in chapter 16 you see Jesus turns to address directly his disciples and says don't you be like that you make sure that you are true sons of lights true children of the father's house of joy and these verses you see are all about resourcefulness and reward the reward of the truly faithful servant and son and they picture and they extravagant and bountiful by investing in this world wisely by investing what God has given us in his people for eternity this parable is often misunderstood and people get tied in knots because they think that Jesus is condoning dishonesty of course he's not doing that and if we see it in the context of chapter 15 it's so much clearer there's such great similarity here's a rich master with a prodigal steward verse 1 who's wasting who's squandering his possessions exactly the words used of the younger prodigal son he was prodigal profligate with his master's wealth for his own resourceful but selfish benefit and so we're told in verse 2 he gets the sack and he's going to have to give an answer to his steward master and turn over the accounts for him to do it himself or to manager so what's he going to do verse 3 he's a financier he's no use as a laborer he won't beg so he realizes he will need friends to help him into a new life and he suddenly realizes the time has come to start being prodigal with his belongings for others benefit and not just for his own and that's what verses 5 to 7 are all about suddenly it is great to be a client of this particular steward because your bills are slashed and you're left with so much less to pay hurrah it's probably to be understood that he's slashing his own cut his own commission from the deal to make friends with others he's taking a hit himself wisely for the sake of the future but even if it is his master's profit that he's cutting either way it doesn't really matter the master is not saying dishonesty is good Jesus is making a very simple point what a shrewd man he proved to be at the end of the day he used the time he had after receiving a warning about a day of reckoning coming he used it to invest wisely for the future and the master commends him not for his fraud but for his foresight he uses what is now clearly a temporary stewardship to assure a lasting and permanent reward and Jesus says to his disciples very plainly in verse 9 you do likewise you sons of light you need the same foresight you need to make friends with unrighteous wealth unrighteous mammon friends who will welcome you into eternity the point couldn't be clear could it that is faithful stewardship verse 10 with what is little with what is yours temporarily as he says in verse 12

in a passing lifetime it's unrighteous mammon that you're to use now it's not unrighteous in and of itself but because so easily and so often it does distort our values but it all depends if you're prodigal enslaving for it and spending it for yourself or for your master and for his people making friends with eternal dwellings of course Jesus isn't talking for a moment about buying your way into heaven chapter 15 couldn't be clearer it's the free forgiveness of grace whoever you are that welcomes you into the father's house and all who come on that basis will receive a welcome but according to Jesus not everyone will find the same rewards in terms of having equally as many friends in his everlasting kingdom listen to how David Gooding puts it if one account surrendered it becomes known in heaven that it was your sacrificial giving that provided copies of

John's gospel say 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 that's pretty unanswerable isn't it I think if my real joy is just in possessions for myself in mammon well I need to realize says Jesus that in of itself that's just little it's not really mine verse 12 it's another's it's temporary because according to Jesus the only thing that will last for eternity is the redeemed people of God and unless I'm truly invested in that well in the end I'll have nothing that's truly my own Paul the apostle understood that didn't he of course that's why he calls the Thessalonian church his joy and crown of boasting before the Lord Jesus at the day of his coming likewise for all the churches his people and that's what Jesus is saying all the way through these chapters chapter 14 there will be a reward for those on the revelation of Jesus who have loved his people even the lowliest the poor the crippled the lame the blind because it's

Christ's people it's his household of perfect joy who will shine forth the manifold wisdom of God to all the heavenly realms for all eternity that's what Paul says in Ephesians 3 that's the purpose of God's great glory it's his greatest and most perfect joy and so if like a faithful steward you have invested heavily now with your earthly substance with the little that you have lent by another if you have invested in his people then Jesus says at last you'll be someone who can be entrusted with true riches with what's lasting with the joy of serving his people forever but if not he's very clear in verse 12 if we've shown no real joy in the master's great joy now in the lost being found and investing in the people of his kingdom well verse 13 I think is pretty plain our real master then hasn't been

God at all the God of compassion and love and rescue our real master has been mammon possessions and that means look at verse 13 that means that the truth is that in our hearts we despise despise God like the elder brother devoted to mammon which really means love for ourselves and that means that we resent we hate the father the God of mercy and compassion and love see we desperately want to think that we can have it both ways that we can love God and we can have a healthy devotion to mammon to prosperity to possessions to all the passions of this world but Jesus says to us friends no you can't you cannot serve God and mammon you cannot be prodigal with what you've been given in life you can't be prodigal for yourself and for

[46 : 51] God and so Jesus says to us to all his disciples be careful don't have more joy in this world's currency whatever that is for you and it could be anything it could be money it could be position it could be education it could be power it could be a thousand other things don't have more perfect joy in mammon than in God's precious people and in the rescue of them from their lostness and sin don't waste your stewardship of the father's property by being prodigal the wrong way there is real wealth there is lasting treasure to be gained real reward but you can't hoard it and gain it for yourself like that in this world verse 12 is clear it can only be given to you that which is lasting from the father and it comes friends to those who are truly prodigal now who waste who squander this world's wealth their time their talents their money who do it for eternal relationships and for a share in the perfect joy of his coming kingdom to this world as verse 14 makes plain it is utterly ridiculous to live that way idiotic and foolish and to be scorned but not to a

God whose perfect joy is even one sinner who repents and so as someone has said he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose let's pray just so I tell you there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents and I tell you make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings God our father forgive us when our view of you is so wrong when our love for you is so weak when our reflection of your mercy and compassion is so lacking help us every one of us to be prodigal with our time our talents and our wealth through every day of this life that one day we may join in the joy of heaven and not be found wanting for Jesus sake amen amen