

Murdo Macdonald: The Prodigal Son

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] Right, the parable of the prodigal son.

The context of this is that the Pharisees, who were the lawkeeper, were looking at Jesus' life and thinking, wait a minute, what's this guy doing?

He's eating with tax collection sinners. He's mingling with people that we think are the lowest of the lower people we don't have any relationship with, that we don't even touch.

So Jesus tells them the three parables. The first two, actually the three parables they all represent, obviously at the end of the parables, something is found.

But in the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin, the lost sheep and the lost son, in fact there are two lost sons in the story, these represent each and every one of us because in and of ourselves we are lost until Jesus finds us.

[1 : 22] So in the three parables, the shepherd is represented, Jesus is represented in the shepherd and also by the woman and in the prodigal son story he's represented by the father.

And the Pharisees are represented by the 99 sheep that aren't lost, the righteous people, so-called, and the nine other coins which are not lost and also the son who stayed at home.

The son who stayed at home, as we see at the end of that parable, he says, I haven't broken any rules, I've kept all the rules and regulations all my life and yet you don't send me, you don't throw me a party.

So they represent the Pharisees that he's talking to. At the time Jesus gave these parables, if someone asked the father for his legacy, for a share of the estate, by saying that you are basically asking your father, your actually earthly father to be dead because that was the only way you were going to actually come into the part of the estate.

So he's actually wishing that his father is dead. So that represents what humanity actually looks by inner sinful state, we are rebels and we want God to be dead.

[3 : 13] But see, God grants us the freedom to accept him or to reject him, that's called free will.

And anyway, it was an unthinkable request because by asking for the share of the estate, he's been ungrateful and he's been selfish, he's breaking his father's heart in the process and his relationship with him and he's cutting himself up from his community.

And the older son refused, later on the older refused, as I was saying, he refuses to be reconciled with the son because he just doesn't want anything to do with him and again, humanly, it's the father in front of the community.

So the son goes off with the part of the inheritance and spends it all on the right of living in a foreign land and he comes to the end of his tether.

He's thrown out of his money, what am I going to do? He's desperate to feed on the food that the Gentiles, the Gentile farmer, whoever he is, was giving but he didn't even get that.

[4 : 33] And this guy who is a Jew, of course, pigs that, he don't touch to have anything to do with pigs. Even that, he sank into the lowest of the lower place where he would even be, even to feed pigs, he would have done that and even eaten, he would have eaten the pigs' food.

And he said, he said to himself, this is, this is crazy. My father back home, he's got all these servants, they just do what my father tells them to do, they've got plenty of food, they've got everything they could possibly have.

And I'm out here in this foreign land amongst the heathen, amongst the Gentiles. I've just wasted all my father's money, what am I going to do? He says, right, what I'll do is, I'm going to concoct a story, well I'll have to make an excuse, I'll go back to my father, I'll tell him that I've sinned, I'll tell him that I'll work my way back into his favour, I'll get a job, I'll make some money, I'll pay him back every single penny, I'll say I'm sorry.

And he was thinking, that's what I'm going to do, I'm going to work my way back into my father's house.

So that's what he did, he started going home under his own strength.

[6 : 02] In Islam, the way a Muslim gets to heaven, or the way a Muslim thinks he's going to get to heaven, they won't get to heaven unless they go through Jesus, we know that, they think that it is what they do that's going to get them to heaven.

It is by their works they are saved. And they actually look at this story of the prodigal son as evidence that the son of the father worked his way back to the father, back to God, and that it was everything that the son did.

But what we're going to find out is that it has nothing to do with what the son did, it is all about what the father did for the son at the end of the day.

It's interesting that Muslims believe in Jesus, that they just think he's a prophet, a good Muslim who did good things, a moral teacher, that he worked his way back to the father and that the father is merciful and compassionate, yes he is.

But for them there's no cross and there's no incarnation, there's no son of God, there's no savior, there's no word that becomes flesh, there's no way of salvation, there's no death and there's no resurrection.

[7 : 22] It's a denial of both the incarnation and the atonement. I don't know if any of you know a novel called C.S. Lewis in a book called Mir Christianity, this is what he says, he's a Christian writer of the 20th century.

He says, I'm trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus. Some people say, I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher but I don't accept his claim to be God.

He says, that's one thing we must not say because a man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice, either this man was and is the son of God or else a madman or something worse.

You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God.

[8 : 38] But let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He's not left that open to us, he did not intend to.

They have it wrong obviously because simply they do not believe that Jesus was the son of God. But anyway, the son has decided that he's going to come home, he's going to do it.

So he's on his way home and in the meantime when he's been away the father has probably been going out every day looking on the side of the town and maybe looking to see if the son is coming, is he coming home?

And he would have been probably going out every day and saying not today, he hasn't come home, he's not on the horizon, don't see him, dash it. And it's broken his heart. Because this father has a broken heart because the son has rejected him.

But one day he goes out and he sees the son afar off and he says that's my son, he's coming home, oh yes, that's incredible, I love my son and I'm going to run out of this town to meet him.

[10 : 10] Now back in the day in the middle, see with these stories we always look at them from our western eyes but you've got to go to Middle Eastern mind frame to see what all that meant.

At that time you wouldn't get a father figure who was a man of status and wealth running, never mind running out of the town but even running at all.

You know it was lifting up his robes and running, it was completely taboo. So when the father sees the son a long way off, he has so much compassion for the son that he lifts his robes and runs out of town to meet him.

And the son sees his father running out and thought what's going on? Because again back in the Middle Eastern, back in the time, if a son who had taken some of the father's property, sold it and headed off and wasted it amongst the Gentiles, the unclean people that the Jews didn't mingle with, he was ostracised by his own people.

So there was a tradition where if one of those folks came back and he was seen to come back, they would perform this right where they would take a pot, a kind of clay pot and when he entered the

town, maybe at the gate, they would stop him and whole community there and they would smash the pot at his feet.

[11 : 53] That represented that he was actually ostracised from the community and they were saying to him that you've lost your sonship.

In fact his father wouldn't have come out at all because his father would have been locked away and hidden and he would have been seething with anger and how could my son have done this to me?

So they would have broken the pot and they would have given him pot for and told him to get knotted. That was the tradition.

So the son on his way home, he sees the father running out of the town and he says, wait a minute, this is crazy, why is my father running out to me?

The son would have expected the father to have hidden himself away because he would have accepted or expected an angry father.

[12 : 55] He would also have expected the pot breaking when he came to the town but he didn't see any of that. He didn't see any of that at all.

He sees the father actually running out of town and is completely amazed by this. It was an offer of unexpected, costly love.

The father in doing this humiliated himself in front of the community. What he did for the son was that what the son deserved, as I've been describing, all the rituals, all the ostracising, just the words and everything, he's deflected what the community were going to pour onto the son.

He's deflected that onto himself by running out of town and he's taken that. So the people look at the father and think, what's that guy doing? That's disgusting for a man of his status to be doing this.

So he's deflected what the wrath and the scorn and everything else of the people onto himself so that the son would be just blown away by the compassion of the father.

[14 : 21] So the father is suffering in all of this all the time. The father is suffering.

So he didn't expect to have any more rights, he expected a loss of sonship, he would have endured and he would have returned home in humiliation of course.

And again he's seen to himself, I'm going to do whatever, I'll work my way back into my father's home, I'll do everything he asked me to do.

But even at that point he still doesn't get it, he's still lost at this point, he's still the lost son. And he thinks it's about the money because he's trying to make up this excuse that I'm going to work back into my father's favour.

But he doesn't realise that it's about the father's broken heart, it wasn't about a broken law, it wasn't about a broken law but a broken relationship. He's not faced his own sin and he doesn't understand what reconciliation means or what it costs, at that point he's still lost.

[15 : 38] So he's returned to the, he's seen the father running out, the father is taking the shame and the humiliation his son deserved and he's running down to reconcile himself, his son to himself, right?

That represents that, it's a mystery, literally represents the mystery and the wonder of God and Christ. And the son doesn't get to finish the speech he has.

I'm going to do this and that for you father, because the father just interrupts and says look, I know exactly what the score is, you don't have to come out with all the excuses, I just accept you as you are unconditionally.

So basically the father in his house represents God the father.

When the father comes out of the town to find the lost son, in that process that's Jesus, basically the father in the house is father God in heaven.

[17 : 01] Father running out and humiliation represents Jesus coming to earth, that's the incarnation, the word becoming flesh, Jesus Christ being born, making his dwelling among us, right?

Jesus said he who has seen me has seen the father and he also said that I and the father are one. In this part of the father, his house represents God and the father running out represents Jesus.

That is the incarnation and also that process is a process that's called the atonement.

The atonement simply means that Jesus Christ, that God through Jesus built a bridge by which God and man could be joined and repatriated.

It's the action of making amends for a wrong or injury. Jesus who was without sin became sin for our sakes. Jesus became the bridge by which God and man could be reconciled.

[18 : 14] For God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself through Jesus, prodigal son and the father.

He's no longer counting people's sins against them. In Hebrews 9 and 10, Christ was sacrificed once and for all time to take away the sins of many. It's an example of costly redeeming love between God and man.

The suffering of the cross wasn't primarily the physical torture but rather the agony of rejected love. The son, he just saw the father and at that point when his father fell on him said, don't come out any excuses, I just love you.

I just want to pour my love on you because you have come home. It was at the point that the son was found that he accepted this grace.

[19 : 22] It's by grace we are saved, not by words. Grace, I don't know if you know the acronym, God's riches at Christ's expense.

In fact, I think one of the best explanations of grace is it's a free gift of love.

You cannot earn it. But it's suffer. It's suffer.

It seeks and suffers in order to save. It seeks. God's love comes out to find but it's also suffering in the process in order to save each and every one of us.

I'm going to tell you a little story about a time many years ago when I was a boy of ten and I don't know if any of you know Callum Dan, if you're down at the call.

[20 : 30] That's where I'm from. John McKeever on sons, contractors, guys with the lorries, etc. Callum Dan is still there, still driving the lorries and things.

When I was a boy of ten, in my younger years I was kind of quite naughty. Sort of naughty. Not too bad. Anyway, this particular day in August 1979, myself, my brother and a guy, Crenter, were in attack.

We just went over to Garry-Chefille. Garry-Chefille was fully operational at that time, they used to make blocks, concrete blocks and they had a garage in that meant to fix their lorries and that in the garage.

They had all that plant going about lorries and the mixing machines and the dumpers and everything else. Anyway, this day we went over to Garry-Chefille too, maybe, I don't know, just to see what mission we could do.

Callum Dan had brought a brand new lorry, Bedford, and we decided to throw stones at it. My brother and my friend threw a stone at it, I threw a stone at it and went right through the windscreen.

[21 : 40] Smashed that windscreen. I said, oh, you can imagine how I felt. That felt completely gutted. I said, no.

I'm a big trouble now. That windscreen is cause for fortune, not only that, but just a shame. When I walked to him, I was full of shame, remorse.

It was a Friday night, I think, cause I had a few days sitting over it. But then I was hearing stories like, oh, they're going to get the police, etc. And this cure that they did is in for the high jump.

I thought Monday, I thought, I have to confess. I have to go to Callum Dan and say, I have to just repent. I have to say I'm sorry. So I did, I'm out walking out of the house, through a charge here, so you had to feel it went down, turn the corner, Callum Dan by the hand.

It was in the engine of a car fixing to whatever, and I saw him. I thought, oh, my, I'm in for trouble, I'm in for trouble now.

[22 : 48] The reason I'm telling you the story, because it's an example, it's always sat on my soul as what graces. And you're going to see this. Like in the story of Prodigal Son, the Prodigal Son comes back to the Father.

I went down to see Callum Dan, to say I was sorry. I had all these excuses in my head, oh, come down here. I could pay back, etc. I can work for you, I can do some stuff in the garage, etc.

And all these things, just like the Prodigal Son and the Father, I'll work my way back into your favour. All these excuses, I walked up to Callum Dan, I was probably crying.

And I said to Callum Dan, Callum Dan, can you please come in? I broke the window. I'm sorry. So I expected Callum Dan, you would expect Callum Dan to give me a piece of his mind.

You know, he's going to have to pay for that windscreen out of his own money. And it was just the whole hassle of the whole thing. But Callum Dan turned around and looked at me.

[24 : 08] You know, even after 37 years, it's hard for me to tell you the story.

He just turned around and looked at me and said, Moto, come on in.

He said, Moto, just forget it. He meant it. He's one of the most gracious men that I know.

Not only did he say, I'll catch you later. He had me smelling it. Not only did he do that, but he said to me, Allah shiachu peki, because you're a brisket in his juice.

He could have floored me. That means go into peki, and she'll give you some biscuits and some juice.

[25 : 20] And I thought, that's just unbelievable. Not only has that man paid in effect for what I did to his lorry, he cancelled it, but right there and then he lifted me out of my doldrums.

He cancelled the debt of my sin. Not only did he do that, but he threw me a party to boot, because he asked me to go and get some juice and biscuits from his wife.

It has always sat on my heart that story, because it is an example of grace, of what the father and the prodigal son did for the son.

He said, it's okay son, don't worry about it. You have accepted being found, and I love you with an unconditional love.

That's not about rules and regulations, what you do and what you don't do. It is simply because I love you, because I can't do anything else but love you, because I am love.

[26 : 28] And so the son would have just been elated, and not only does he say it's okay, but he says, tell the people to kill the fat and calf, tell the people to put a ring on his finger, put shoes on his feet, give him the best robe, and let's celebrate, let's have a party.

That's when Callum Dan gave me, told me to go and do his wife to get the juice and biscuits. It's the same thing. It does, I didn't deserve it. I knew what I deserved.

I didn't know what authority knew what it deserved to, but it was the costly redeeming love of the father that was completely unexpected. Wow, that's just unbelievable.

But that's over God. That's how much God loves each and every one of you, and me. That it doesn't matter what we've done in the past, or even what we've done in the future, not that we have an excuse to do what we want, no.

All these things, even the person with the darkest hustle in the past, can be forgiven by the God of love. That's what our journey in life is about, being found and accepting the grace of God freely offered to us in the gospel.

[27 : 50] That's why for some people it's so difficult. It's like, I've got to do something. I've got to do something. I've got to do X, Y and Z. Then I feel that I'm worthy to receive this gift or receive something.

I've got to do something. But a gift is free. That's the whole thing about a gift. It's freely offered. So that's the story about that.

Now, at the end of the story, the son is taken back to the house, and the other son hears the commotion and says, what's going on?

And he's told what's going on. This is the son that kept all the rules and regulations all his life. He thought he deserved everything his father had. And he just can't get it into his head that his father would have thrown a party for this retrograde, and spent his life with prostitutes and gambling, whatever he did, it doesn't matter.

He just can't accept it. He just doesn't understand the love of the father. So when the party was going on, of course, in that custom, the sons are meant to share and give food and accept the guests in, and the father would be sitting at the table and not moving.

[29 : 22] But this son who's outside didn't come into the party. So again, what happens is, like the first son, when the father was humiliated himself running out of the town, this second son then humiliates his father, the second son humiliates his father by making the father come out of the party, come out from the table in front of all the guests, and then start going to the son and say, come on son, just come in.

The first son, the brother was dead, he's alive, he's come home, it's great, let's celebrate. He cannot accept it. So in the process, he's humiliated his father again.

This is God, this is the father. And he says, look son, everything I had is huge anyway. But the son just, he couldn't accept it.

He represented the Pharisees, you see, the Pharisees thought it is by rules and regulations that we get to heaven. He said to his father, I've kept all your laws, all my life, but you didn't even give me

anything to celebrate, son.

But the Pharisees, everything I have is huge. He just didn't get it. So that's grace, the grace of God. [30 : 39] So it's a freely offered love that seeks and suffers in order to save. In Isaiah 53, it says, Christ is God's suffering servant, or the man of sorrows.

The prophet said that the anointed one, when he came, would enter his glory through suffering. That's the thing, eh? That God loves us so much that he came to suffer for us.

In order to save us. It's all about what the father did in the story. People always think it's a Prologal Son, oh yes, the Son, the Son, the Son, the Son. It's not, it's about what the father did.

It's about the compassion and the love of the father, who humiliated himself, and took everything onto himself. There's a word, I know it's a word that isn't in the Bible, it's called propitiation.

It's a big word, but it's quite simple, the meaning of it. Christ's blood is the propitiation. Christ's blood had to be spilt because he was a sacrifice, one sacrifice, once and for all, to atone for the sin of all of humanity.

[31 : 56] So when Christ became the propitiation, basically, that was Jesus on the cross. His blood was shed, and when he hung there, the father poured out his wrath into him.

Poured out what we deserved onto the Son. But his blood covers us. If you believe in Christ as Lord and Savior, his blood is the propitiation and absorbs all the guilt and the shame and everything because Jesus Christ took it all at Calvary.

He took the whole caboodle, the sin of the past, the present and the future. It's an incredible concept. It's not even a concept, it is the truth.

And all because he loves us so much, every single person on the planet. And on Calvary, that's what he did.

He shielded us. Basically, he was there and all of humanity was behind him. When God poured what we deserved onto the Son and he took it.

[33 : 12] And in that darkness, when he says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That was the rejection of the Father.

The Father couldn't bear to regard that sin, so he turned his face away. He couldn't be in that place when his own Son became sin for us.

Incredible. But hey, come on, the good news is that Jesus Christ rose again from the dead.

Triumphant. He defeated death. He defeated Satan. He wiped out the sin. He took the sin, that badness, of the whole world into himself.

And when we accept Jesus as saviour, all our sin, past, present and future, is nailed to the cross at Calvary. It's hammered into it.

[34 : 17] And he's taken it and he's stamped the word, cancelled or paid onto our very hearts. And there's nothing you can do then to lose that because we are his and we have been ridden in the Book of Life.

And at the end of these three stories, the one about the sheep and the coin, the lost son, what happens, the shepherding party.

Because they want to celebrate. Because something that was lost is now found. And God is just overwhelmed. It says that there is more rejoicing in heaven, in the presence of the angels of God over one lost sinner who repents.

One lost sinner. Just one person on this planet today, even in this church. Whoever today accepts Jesus as Lord, who actually says, my Lord and my God.

And they believe the moment the light comes on. And you say, my God, I believe it. There is rejoicing with the millions upon billions of angels in heaven.

[35 : 36] When they look down and they say, there's another redeemed soul. Wow. The whole of heaven rejoices just for one. That's amazing isn't it?

Thousands of people come to Christ every day. Well, we hear about it in like, Africa and the Far East and in the other places. Thousands accept to be found and think about the perpetual celebration in heaven over all these people.

That's amazing isn't it? Come on. We're nothing to be afraid about. We're nothing to fear. We are Christ. We are the happiest people on the planet. We should be.

And we are. So let's go and share the good news and be joys.

So the business of heaven, it's a weighty matter. It's literally a matter of life or death. Jesus says, I am the resurrection and the life.

[36 : 43] He who believes in me will live even if he dies. And anyone who lives and believes in me will never die. He also says, here I am. I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person and they with me. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne.

Just as I was victorious and sat down with my father on his throne. So come on. Let's make our calling and election sure. We can do that today.

God wants to lavish his love on you. Kiss you like the father went to reach out for the prodigal son, met him, fell on him and kissed his neck.

And kissed him and kissed him and loved him. He wants to soothe your souls and take you home to heaven when we come to the end of our journeys. And there you will take your place at the great banquet.

[37 : 44] That is what is promised. It's got your name on it right now. When you accept Christ as Lord, you have been given a place at the banquet. And all, you'll be there with all the other redeemed sons and daughters of the living God.

So let's not remain in a distant fallen land, but today, even at this very moment, let's start retracing your steps back home, home to God, because that's why we were created. Not just for 70 or 80 years on this planet, because it's nothing.

We're talking about an eternity, an endlessness. You cannot even comprehend what eternity is because it's endlessness forever and ever and ever in the goodness of God and Jesus Christ and all the redeemed and all the angels.

That is profound. That's what it's about. So let's not remain distant today. Let your mortal be. I once was lost, but I am now found.

I was blind, but now I see. Amen.