



THE PRODIGAL GOD

THE PRODIGAL GOD: HOPE FOR BOTH BROTHERS

August 8, 2021

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Luke 15:11-15:32

Welcome to the Doxa Church podcast. In this series, The Prodigal God, we will take a closer look at the most well-known story in the Bible and uncover what we may have all missed in the account of the forgiving father and his two sons. For more information about Doxa or to join us for a Sunday gathering, go to doxa-church.com.

Good morning, Doxa. Praying for you as you make these transitions. Bring you greetings from your brothers and sisters in Christ and Issaquah. We are your sister church, and we are just like Jesus in that we are homeless. We have been meeting in various locations since the pandemic began. This morning we are meeting at a nursery, Squak Mountain Nursery in Issaquah, last week we met at Confluence Park, and between now and October 1st, where we have our own space, we will be meeting in parks and outdoor spaces and praying that it doesn't rain. And we've had a couple staff openings for some time. On Friday we hired a new executive pastor from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. So we relate to the questions and the mystery and the uncertainty that you guys are going through. It's funny, Jeff, we had one of our pastors talking with our new hire, whose name is Shiju, and we asked him if he was ready for the cultural opposition to the gospel. He looked at Shiju and he said, "You know, people here are hard. They are opposed to the gospel." And he's like, "I'm from Philadelphia." Anyway.

Brothers and sisters, the Soma churches in the region have a vision for what church should look like. We are one church. We are one church that understands the gospel, that understands the

message that Jesus preached and lived. This gospel of grace welcomes all of us back home. Welcomes us back to the home that we lost at the fall. Welcomes us back and it transforms our heart with overwhelming love, the type of love that restores us and sets us on a path of restoration and reconciliation. We have a vision of one church that is made up of former enemies and strangers. And now these former enemies and these former strangers work together for God's mission. And we seek out others who are strangers and enemies. One church united, full of the Spirit, submitted to the Father, living like Jesus. If you're not fully aware of this, I just want to welcome you to that. Soma Eastside, Doxa, Soma Federal Way, Soma Tacoma, a group called Dope Church, and a Soma church up in Vancouver that we haven't even been able to get to because the border's been closed. We are one church working together for the same purpose. I want to thank Donald for inviting me this morning for the Prodigal God series. I have enjoyed watching the previous sermons and my hope was that I wouldn't repeat myself too often this morning, but I'm also confident knowing that whatever I say will be done with a dry sense of humor and with an Eastern Washington accent and therefore it'll seem brand new regardless.

But my title today is God's Joy When the Lost are Found. And my three points are God's Joy When a Rebel Comes Home, God's Joy When the Legalist Joins the Party or Comes Home and then God's Heart for God's People to Bring the Lost and the Proud to One Table. And today I'm going to follow a simple way of reading scripture. It's really observe, interpret, and apply. So I'm going to tell the story, and matter of fact, I'm going to back up, I'm gonna tell all three stories in this chapter. And then I'm going to make some comments on it, we're gonna do a little bit of interpretation, and then a little bit of application, but even in the application section, I want you to not to think, "What do I need to do?" Think "Who should I be in light of the gospel? What does my life preach in light of what I know about the gospel?" So more of an implication than an application. But please bear with me today as I tell the story, as I modernize them.

None of you own sheep. And even if you did, you would just prove the point, you'd just be the exception that proves the rule. You have no idea what the value of sheep is. And so I'm going to replace them with purebred dogs. I did some research about dogs. I cannot believe how much money people pay for dogs. And then coins. I mean, how many of you get upset when you lose a quarter? Some of you people are like, what's a quarter? Okay. What if you lost a Bitcoin? 20% of all Bitcoin are considered lost cause no one remembers the password. Straight up, but here we go, three stories.

Let's start with the Parable of the Sheep. Jesus begins the story, or Luke begins talking about all these notorious sinners. And for us, it's a little bit different because tax collectors, IRS agents are not that popular, but you don't know any. And you can hire legal help to get around IRS stuff anyway, most of the time. Not the same in the first century. So if it helps, why don't you think about billionaire capitalists that live in rich, ridiculous luxury while other people starve. Why don't you think about people that steal your passwords and your data and your credit card number? Why don't you think about that gay choir in San Francisco that's saying we are coming for your children. Why don't you think about Seattle politicians that let criminals go

that hurt others. Maybe you can think about Andrew Cuomo, maybe even Trump. All these people, all these notorious people are coming to listen to Jesus and the religious complain about it, say, "What's going on? You're eating with them. Why don't you confront them and shun them like they should be confronted and shunned?" So Jesus tells this story.

If a man had a hundred purebred Tibetan Mastiffs that he used for breeding, and one of them runs off, what will he do? Won't he leave the 99 others and go search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders, and he'll post on social media, "Look, everybody. I found my puppy." You can imagine how many comments. I mean, you've got comments, you've got shares. Everyone is excited. There is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away. Or suppose a woman has 10 Bitcoins and forgets the password to the drive that contains the private keys to the digital wallet that holds the last Bitcoin. She only has 10 guesses to get it right. And on the 10th guess, she remembers, "Oh, my password was catponylover1995." And she unlocks the Bitcoins and calls in her friends and yells, "I'm buying drinks for everyone because that Bitcoin is worth \$44,000. As of this morning, according to my Robinhood app." In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.

Jesus hammering this point home continues. A man had two sons. The first one comes to his father and says, "Dad, look at all these families who are destroyed when they fight over an inheritance. Instead of doing that, why don't just give it to me now? Instead of me wishing that you were dead later, why don't you just give me the inheritance now?" So His father agreed, gave him his inheritance. The younger kid packs up, moves out. There he wastes his money in extravagant stupidity. Vegas. Brand name apparel. And even invests a huge chunk of it in dogecoin. All at the father's expense. About the time that his money runs out a great famine sweeps over the land. He begins to starve. He persuades a local farmer in Eastern Washington to hire him. The man sends him out in the field to feed the free range, ethically sourced, shade-grown pigs. The young man becomes so hungry that even the pods that he was feeding the pigs looked good to him, but no one gives him anything. He finally comes to his senses and he says to himself, "Man, even my dad's minimum-wage workers eat Chick-fil-A on occasion. Here I am dying of hunger. I'm going to go to my dad and say, 'I've sinned against you in heaven. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant'".

So he goes home to his dad, and when he's a long way off, his dad exclaims and he runs out and he hugs him. He says, "Dad, I'm not worthy to be your son. I've sinned against you, against heaven." But his father yells to the support staff, "Quick, bring the Brooks Brothers 100% cotton thick pile robe and put it on him. Give him a mani/pedi. Put meat on the Traeger. Hire a cover band. Let's have a party. For this son of mine was dead and now he's alive. He was lost, but now he's found."

So the party begins all at the father's expense. Meanwhile, the older son is out in the field working because he's always out in the field working. Because he's a responsible older son. He works hard. He saves. He does what dad tells him to. And as he's returning home, he hears

music and he asks one of the workers what's going on. He said, "Well, your brother's home. Your brother came back. Your father has welcomed him. And there's a massive party." And the older brother is pissed and he's not going in. There's no way he's going back in. His father comes out and begs him. And he responds, "All these years, I've worked, I've stayed put, I've been responsible, and younger brother comes home. Did you even see the social media post, dad? Do you know what he used your money on? And now he's sitting on the deck in the Brooks Brothers robe. He's got a party. This is the second series of parties he's had at your expense, dad. Neither deserved." His father says, "Look, son, you've always stayed with me. You've always been with me. Everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this joyful event. Your brother was dead. Do you remember how I mourned? He's now come back to life. He was lost, and now he is found."

Here are our points. Let's do some interpretation work here. Look at God's joy when the rebel comes home. Each of these stories celebrates what happens, just the natural emotional response, when something valuable is found. You've got a really expensive dog that you found, or a really expensive sheep that you found. You have a really expensive coin that you found. It's just natural that you would share about it, that you would celebrate it. And then his son comes home. And you know, I was thinking about, it's really hard to stay mad at a pet that you love, even when they do something stupid. And you know, if you're emotionally connected with anything at all, you're not going to get mad at an inanimate object. It's really your fault that you lost it. But someone related to you that repeatedly does something stupid. Hmm. But God's joy is real. You can see his heart in this passage. He just wants to set up say, "Man, if you're excited about the coin, if you're excited about the sheep or the dog, I want you to be excited about your brother coming home, about your sister coming home." Can you see God's heart? He is watching and waiting for his son to come home. He is filled with love and compassion. Matter of fact, it spills over. Have you ever known anyone whose child dies, whose child has died? You've seen them mourn. If you've seen them mourn then you understand the joy of one coming back.

This is such, if you don't get the scandal here. If you don't see how it's just almost enabling to celebrate the son coming home the way he does. If you don't understand that scandalous part of it, you probably don't understand grace. Also see God's joy, God's future joy, when the legalist comes back to the party. God, the father wants the son who is in a sense, rightfully outraged to also come back. Brothers and sisters, salvation, the gospel, it's all about reconciliation. It's about former enemies being brothers. It's about, it's not just about you being reconciled to God. It's about us being reconciled to each other. God wants us to be family, to be functional family.

The brother in the story is not quite ready for reconciliation. And every time as a pastor that I get to talk about reconciliation, which might be my favorite part, might even be my favorite word that's related to the gospel. People come up to me afterwards and they'll say, "Well, what about this circumstance? I have rightfully cut someone out of my life because they are dangerous. They are toxic. They crossed the line." And I understand that. And I don't think this story necessarily gives us all the answers. I think it's possible that we need the book of

Proverbs. I think it's possible that in some of these circumstances, we need the elders to come alongside us and help us see wisdom and set boundaries and all those things. But please understand. This is primarily a story about a younger brother who is foolish, recklessly foolish, who costs everyone in his circle. But God's heart is for reconciliation to take place. I don't think if we, I think if we ignore reconciliation, we ignore the gospel.

Third point, the heart of God and God's people is about bringing the lost and the proud to the same table. I think in our cultural moment, just speaking of the evangelical church as a whole, we really resonate with the foolish brother coming home. But we do not understand the proud and the foolish reconciling. I don't know how many of you enjoyed 2020 or 2021. One of the best things about Facebook is seeing all the ads for t-shirts. My favorite one last year was a shirt that said 2020, and it had one star, and it said, "Very bad. Do not recommend." And then toward the end of the year, they started selling Christmas ornaments and they had one with a dumpster fire and it said 2020 on it. I don't know how many of you went to Washington State like I did, I saw a lot of dumpster fires. Actually at Washington State, what we did was we took couches and we put them on top of active barbecues. And that really made a statement. That's 2020. The worst part about 2020 for me though, was not the mask mandates. It was not getting to see my, it was not having to be apart from my brothers and sisters in Christ. The worst part about 2020, where the church splits and the people fighting about secondary issues. Dare I say tertiary issues, fourthary issues. Nowhere connected to the gospel issues. As we split and left without saying goodbye. And accusations and cruel words and refusal to reconcile. Church difficulties that ended up with people not talking to each other, and then the elders of the church paying for reconciliation and saying it's available to you and them saying, "No, thank you." And then a direct phone call and them saying, and I quote, "I am not interested in reconciliation." Are you interested in Jesus? It's amazing. The things that Jesus said about forgiveness and reconciliation. He said something like this. Maybe you can say it with me. "If you refuse to forgive others, your heavenly Father will not forgive your sins." He said that right after he taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer.

Reconciliation. It is God's heart. He appeals to our heart here. It's not a scolding from dad to the older brother. Do you hear it? He says, this is the New Living Translation, "Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day for your brother was dead. And now he's come back to life. He was lost. But now he is found."

Do you see these stories are just setting up. The animal has value, the coin has value, and the son has unestimable value. How can we continue to stand off and say, "No, no, he doesn't deserve this party. He hasn't paid for this party." And the father just says, "I paid for it. I paid for it, son. Come back."

Truth is that younger brother couldn't pay. And I think we know that. When we've been hurt by someone there's not a, you can't put a dollar amount on it. What can you possibly do for someone else to undo the hurt that has been caused? God knows that. That's why he sent Jesus to pay, to pay what you and I could not pay. So we ought to reconcile. What are the

implications? I have four implications. I thought to myself, these four implications, plus those three interpretations, probably makes a seven point sermon, but I'm going to divide it up this way.

The first implication is remember that God's grace is enough to completely wipe out your most notorious sin. You know all those, you know, Jesus is speaking to the religious people who are also in the same gathering as these people who have committed notorious sins. He wants to make the example very clear, but if maybe you're sitting here today, you're like the younger son, who has wandered off and you just look around at the wreckage of your life, just the series of regrets, and you just feel far away from home. God just wants to remind you that his grace covers all of it, overwhelms all of it. If you have a Bible with you, Ephesians 1, just open it up. Ephesians 1. If you've got an app, open it up, and I need your help. I understand you're a lot like my congregation. You do not enjoy yelling things out. When I've been here in the past and I've asked for an amen, I get some silence, but I need your interaction today, if you don't mind. I'll even smile when I ask it. I would love your interaction.

Ephesians chapter one. In God's sight what are we? Two words. What are we? In his sight what are we? Ephesians chapter one. First segment. Saints! What does saints mean? Holy and what else? What's the other word? Chosen, thankful. One of the versions says blameless or without faults. In God's sight, brothers and sisters in Christ. The reason you and I are his favorite sons, favorite daughters, holy and without fault in his sights. Not because of your awesomeness, because of your competence, because of your responsibility, but because of the work of Jesus. If you feel far away from God right now, it is not, if you feel far away from God, it's because you've turned away from him, not because his grace is insufficient to cover all of your sin. And even beyond that, I mean, holy, perfect. That's been gifted to you by Jesus. So it's just that your foolishness has been wiped away. It's that he has given you Jesus' righteousness. And this one's even, I think this is even more beautiful. Toward the end of the chapter, Paul tells the saints in Ephesus that they have an inheritance waiting. Now I have in my, on my phone, I've already referenced this once today, I have an app, I've got Robinhood. This is not an advertisement for Robinhood, but I can just pull it up and I can look at some of my retirement. And some days that's comforting to me in a very small way. What if you had a app called heavenhood that you could see your inheritance in heaven? My guess is that would fill you with great comfort. You're like, holy cow, no way, no way. You have no idea what is waiting for you. No clue. If you did, I don't think you would have too many bad days. Cause who cares? It's waiting for me in heaven. It was purchased for me by Jesus. It cannot be touched. It cannot rust. There won't be a dip in the stock market that'll affect it. Come home. Just turn. And I love it. The rebel son turns and dad is there. What a beautiful picture.

Second implication, remember that God's love for you is based on the works of Jesus, not your personal history. Let's be honest, this story. He's talking to the religious people who are judging those notorious sinners, but these religious people have a thing or two that is wrong with them. Namely the worst sin in scripture, which is pride. I am by vocation a pastor. I don't know how your vocation is doing in 2021, mine is doing poorly. I think the most popular podcasts in my circles, sorry for bringing it up, Doxa, is the Rise and Fall of Mars Hill. One of my

brothers in Christ, who was an Acts 29 church planter early on, posted this this week on Facebook. He said, "I've been listening to this podcast series by Mike Cosper. And he said, and all of a sudden it hit me, that growing up," he grew up in Chicago, "that Bill Hybels was my pastor growing up." When he went to college, he switched churches and went to James MacDonald's church. And then he joined Acts 29 and followed the leadership of Mark Driscoll. If you haven't been listening to the podcast, all three of those have been featured, just talking about their particular fall. And he said it, he says, "Listening to this." He said, "I realized I had my own type of fall, but as I fell, that the Lord graciously put godly people in my life and pastors to help me and sustain me. And the Lord's purpose in this trial, this hardship, this confrontation of sin," he said, "I see God using it to refine me, establish my faith, established my identity, not in a leader, but in Jesus." And hear this, this is beautiful. "And now I am able to truly show compassion to others." Even among the paid clergy, the Christian elite, we desperately need grace. And it's not, not because of our religious society that we have worth and value, it's because of the work of Jesus.

Third implication, let us search our hearts to see if we truly love the lost or just the ones whose sin is similar to ours. Dream with me just for a second, Doxa. And you're about ready to make a couple transitions, this is a good time to start dreaming, to start thinking. What if our churches were the type of welcoming places where both the legalist and the rebel knew that they would be welcomed? The less popular version of Les Mis, was starring Liam Neeson, and it starts off with Liam Neeson, he's Jean Valjean. He's destitute, he's a criminal. He doesn't have any place to sleep. He's too ashamed even to knock on doors and he's getting ready to sleep on this park bench. It's obviously cold. And a woman comes up and says, "You can't sleep here." And he says, "I have nowhere to sleep." She says, "Well knock there." And he's like, "I've knocked everywhere." She said, "You haven't knocked there." And he goes, and he knocks on the door. A priest opens the door and immediately says, "Come in." What if Doxa was a place like that? Where the most notorious sinners knew that if they came here, they would be welcomed. Over time, over the last 15 years, serving in this region, I realized that it's not enough for my heart to be willing for that. I have to be deliberate and intentional about it so that people know. I saw a Jackie Hill Perry YouTube video. It was under the question, I'm going to list it in a positive sense so it's clear, but basically the question was, what does the evangelical church know about the LGBTQ+ community? You know what her answer was? Nothing. Nothing. How can we welcome that community if we know nothing about them? What if that welcome was part of our liturgy? What if they knew every week, okay, if you are, if you are a political enemy of the church, we welcome you. If you do things that we fundamentally disagree with, you are our enemy and Jesus told us to love our enemy and we love you, you are welcome. What if we opened our home to people that despise us and hate us, and that they knew that even though they disagreed with everything about us, that they were always welcome to come, to be part of our dinner, to join us at the table. What if we became the type of people that we see in this story, this dad, the son after embarrassing himself and embarrassing the family and causing the family all sorts of shame, that he knew, man, dad will take me back.

Finally, let's become a people whose heart and actions welcomed the lost back home. I know there are Christians that have offended you, that have hurt you, that have hurt you repeatedly,

that have caused you grief, that have said all manner of difficult and hurtful things. There's a whole list of things they did against you, that they shouldn't have. There's a whole list of things that they shouldn't have done against you, that they did. Would you pray? Would you pray "God, give me your heart." Would you, would you pray "God, show me the value of my brothers and sisters in Christ, so that when they repent, I can rejoice like you. That I won't have to stand out in the field and refuse to come into the table." Maybe even that we pray that somehow God would show us the hurtfulness of our own sin, of our own pride, of our own stubbornness, so that we can somehow relate to those who are prideful and stubborn, hurtful. Doxa, Jesus wants us to be one. He wants us to reconcile. Think about if I preached this sermon about reconciliation and one of you hurt me, did something I didn't like and I refuse to talk to you, refused mediation. You would rightfully disregard this sermon as empty words. Brothers and sisters in Christ. We are people of the gospel. How can we refuse to forgive? How can we split churches so often? How can we walk away from our brothers and sisters in Christ without even saying goodbye? The good news is that God forgives us even for this. Would you join me in prayer?

Father, I pray for one church. Father, I pray for reconciliation. Father, I pray for those in the room right now that are the younger son in this story, that have wandered far away from you and have spent years, dollars, energy in ridiculous foolishness. Father, please draw them back to you. Remind them that even now, all they have to do is just to turn to repent, to believe. Help them to believe. And Father help the proud in the room, those that have been hurt by others, disgusted by others, disgusted by notorious sinners, to see your heart for the lost. God, help us to reconcile. God, I beg you for this region, help us to be one. Help us to reconcile. Help us to love each other. Help us to understand, not just preach this gospel of forgiveness, but live it. Father, help us to become a church that is made up of former enemies and strangers. God, help us accomplish the mission, to fix what's broken in the relationships of this world. Help us to welcome in the abused and the abandoned. Help us to get them back on their feet. Help us to reweave what has unraveled. Help us to be one church united. Full of the Spirit, submitted to you, and grateful for Jesus. Father, we love you. Whatever good happens of our lives, of our church, we give you all the praise and all the glory. And all my brothers and sisters join me in saying, Amen.