

# “My Worth and My Unworthiness”

(Luke 15:11-32)

## Introduction

➤ It can be immensely difficult for us to recognize and confess that we are sinners (it’s hard enough to admit when we make a mistake). People will go to great lengths in attempting to ignore, rationalize or justify their sin. Today it is vogue to call sin ‘sickness’, or human ‘error’, or even some type of a ‘disorder.’ Tragically, many church leaders are peddling such deadly contemporary diagnoses in their preaching and teaching in an attempt to protect their congregants’ delicate self-esteem and fragile egos. The fact is, most people simply are not comfortable referring to themselves as a “wretched” sinner, and so they go to great lengths to avoid even thinking about it. Consequently, many churches preach only self-affirming, self-loving, crowd-pleasing, messages.

For example, Isaac Watt’s classic hymn (1707) “Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed” has undergone some ‘revisions’ over the years. The original words of the first verse read as follows: “Alas! and did my Savior bleed, and did my Sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head, for such a worm as I?” However, some people found the word “worm” too offensive and insulting. So that line was changed to read, “Would He devote that sacred head, for sinners such as I?” But, for many, that modification did not go far enough. So, it was later changed again to read, “Would He devote that sacred head, for such a one as I?”

Even the famous hymn “Amazing Grace” (1722), by John Newton, reads: “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me.”

➤ In Scripture, however, we see both New Testament and Old Testament saints embracing the fact that they were utterly sinful apart from Christ – wretched sinners saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Here are just a few notable examples:

**Job 25:4-6** ~ “How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure? Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in his eyes; how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm!” (see Ps.22:6)

**Isaiah 6:5** ~ “And I said: ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’”

**Romans 7:24** ~ “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”

**1 Timothy 1:15** ~ “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”

**1 Corinthians 15:9** ~ “For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”

**Matt 15:25-27** ~ ““But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ <sup>26</sup>And he answered, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ <sup>27</sup>She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’”

**Luke 5:8** ~ “But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’”

**Luke 18:13** ~ “But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’”

**Revelation 3:17** [Laodicea] ~ “For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.”

➤ The refusal to see ourselves as sinners in need of God's saving grace is not just prideful; it's idolatry. It is the stubborn rejection of God – His holiness, His grace, His Word, and His salvation. We must recognize our absolute need of the Savior, that He is our only hope and only Savior, and that God's saving grace is completely undeserved and unmerited. Then, and only then, will we give Him the praise and honor that is due His name.

➤ Yet, the Bible also declares the indescribable worth of those whom God has created in His image and redeemed through His Son Jesus Christ! Among all of God's magnificent creation, only humans are made in His image. In addition, those who have been saved by God through Christ are declared righteous, set apart by God as holy, adopted into God's family, and promised the unfading crown of glory in eternity (1Pet.5:4; see 2Tim.4:8; Jms.1:12). Here are just a few Scriptures declaring the human's worth in Christ:

**Ps 8:3-6** ~ “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, <sup>4</sup>what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. <sup>6</sup>You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet” (see Gen.1:26-28; 9:6; 1Cor.6:3; Heb.2:5-9, 16; Jms.3:9)

**Ps 103:2-5** ~ “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, <sup>3</sup>who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, <sup>4</sup>who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, <sup>5</sup>who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.”

**Ps 139:14** ~ “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.” (Is.43:7)

**Matt 10:29-31** ~ “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

**Eph 2:10** ~ “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (see Eph.4:24; Col.3:10)

**1 John 3:1** ~ “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. ...”

➤ So, we find this tension (paradox) in Scripture: 1) We have tremendous worth and value because God has made us in His image, and specifically because God has redeemed those who are in Christ. 2) We are depraved sinners, who marred the image of God, rebelled against His will and commands, and are absolutely undeserving of salvation and justly condemned.

This is the “good news” and “bad news” of the Gospel – the “bad news” (condemnation) is that we are justly condemned by God as sinners, and the “good news” (salvation) is that we are totally forgiven by God's grace through faith in Christ. That “bad news” is really bad, and the “good news” is really good.

➤ Everything hinges upon Jesus Christ – those who reject Jesus as the Christ are depraved and damned in their sin, and those who receive Jesus as the Christ are redeemed and loved by God. Our sense of “worth” must not come from self but from Christ – who He is, and what He has done. For the only “good” that it within us comes from Christ in us, and the only “good things” we do comes from Christ working through us.

✓ **Illust:** “Moreover, the cross of Christ teaches us both attitudes. On the one hand, the cross is the God-given measure of the value of our true self, since Christ loved us and died for us. On the other hand, it is the God-given model for the denial of our false self, since we are to nail it to the cross and so put it to death. Or, more simply, standing before the cross we see simultaneously our worth and our unworthiness, since we perceive both the greatness of his love in dying, and the greatness of our sin in causing him to die” (Stott, John. *The Cross of Christ*; p.278).

- This paradoxical truth is also declared in the great worship song “My Worth is not in What I Own” (written by Graham Kendrick and Keith & Kathy Getty in 2014), which is the selected song this morning for our Summer Sermon Series. The fifth verse of this song declares:

Verse 5

Two wonders here that I confess / My worth and my unworthiness  
My value fixed my ransom paid at the cross

- In my opinion, no passage of Scripture more vividly, beautifully, and profoundly illustrates the profound truth of our utter unworthiness apart from Christ and our infinite worthiness in Christ.

**Luke 15:11-32** ~ “And [Jesus] said, ‘There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup>And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>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! <sup>18</sup>I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’”

<sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup>Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup>And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup>But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup>but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ <sup>31</sup>And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup>It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

- It is important to remember that, as a general rule, parables (*parabolē*) are an extended simile and therefore have one major point (e.g., “*the kingdom of heaven is like ...*”; Matt.13:24, 31, 33). In Luke fifteen, Jesus told three parables – the parable of the lost sheep (vs.4-7), the parable of the lost coin (vs.8-10), and the parable of the lost (prodigal) son (vs.11-32) – which all have the same central purpose and theme:

**Luke 15:1-2** ~ “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ <sup>3</sup>So he told them this parable ...”

- While this passage warrants multiple sermons – in fact, entire books have been written on this one parable (see “A Tale of Two Sons” by John MacArthur) – for our time this morning, I want to examine this parable by its three major characters and themes.

## 1. The PRODIGAL son ~ a portrait of an unrighteous sinner (vs.11-19)

➤ We are introduced to this “prodigal son” in an inglorious way: *“And [Jesus] said, ‘There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me’”* (vs.11-12). The son’s shocking demand is reprehensible – especially within Judaism in the first century. Jesus could hardly have started off with a more scandalous and reprehensible introduction.

Not only was it appallingly disrespectful for a son to want his inheritance before his father died (essentially wanting his father to establish a trust fund for him) but being that he was the younger son made his selfish request all the more inappropriate.

Furthermore, as is clear in the story, this younger son did not want the money for any honorable reasons (e.g., to start a small business, to buy a home, to start a family). He wanted his independence. And the implication in the story is that he wanted to leave and never return (vs.24, 32). He was essentially telling his father, “I do not want to live here anymore! I do not want to be under your authority! I wish you were dead. I do not want to be your son!” (see vs.19).

➤ Shockingly, the father granted the son’s insolent request. Again, this is especially egregious to those who were listening to Jesus tell this parable. We can only imagine the stunned and horrified looks on their faces (possibly even audible gasps) when Jesus said: *“And he [the father] divided his property between them”* (vs.12). This was, presumably, no small sum of money as the father appears to have been a wealthy man (“servants” [vs.19, 22]; “robe ... ring ... shoes” [vs.22]; “fatted calf” [vs.23, 27]; “music” [vs.25]). Some scholars estimate that the son would have been given one-third of the father’s entire estate.

The son deserved to be reprimanded if not outright disciplined. For his actions – whether intentional or not – would have brought shame to his father. The father had a right to be hurt and angered by such a request, but instead graciously and mercifully gave the rightful share to his son.

➤ Not surprisingly, the son soon left his father’s house and wasted the money from his inheritance on frivolous, hedonistic, and sinful things: *“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”* (vs.13). Geographically, he went “far” (vs.13) from home (most likely meaning to the regions of the Gentiles), but relationally he could not have been farther from his father. Morally, he was utterly depraved as *“he squandered his property in reckless living”* (vs.13). The Greek word translated “squandered” (*diaskorpizō*) could literally be translated “scattered” (Matt.25:24, 26), as the son effectively just threw his money to the winds. In reality, he spent his money pursuing a lifestyle that was “reckless” (*asōtōs*; “wild” [NET], “foolish” [HCSB], “loose” [NAS]); “riotous” [KJV]; “prodigal” [NKJV]). Later in the story, the older brother alleged that the younger brother spent the money on “prostitutes” (vs.30).

The son is a portrait of an unrighteous sinner – one who has rebelled against God and despised God’s love and grace. The son wanted the father’s money more than he wanted the father’s love. Likewise, the rebellious sinner would rather “love the world” and “the things in the world” (1Jn.2:15; cf. 2Tim.4:10), than love God and the things of God. The sinner would rather indulge in “the fleeting pleasures of sin” (Heb.11:25), than the eternal joys of true righteousness in Christ. A “prisoner of the moment”, and a slave to “instant gratification”, the son had no concern about the consequences of his actions.

➤ In seemingly no time at all, the son *“had spent everything”* (vs.14). He quite literally, and quite quickly, went from “feast to famine”, from “riches to rags.” For, as the story goes, *“a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need”* (vs.14). His life of luxury, and no doubt his social popularity, had all come to a screeching halt. The consequences of his careless, reckless, and sinful life had suddenly come upon him. Seemingly overnight, he went from being wealthy to being in poverty.

✓ Illust: “His own bad decisions, coupled with this severe external crisis brought about by the famine, brought him to an inconceivable level of desperation. He had forsaken his family, and his so-called friends had forsaken him. He was a stranger in a foreign land, with nowhere to go and no one to turn to for help. He was penniless, destitute, without resources. Seeking unrestrained pleasure, unabated

lusts, and unrestricted behavior, he wound up instead with pain, emptiness on the brink of death. Yet despite his dire circumstances, he was not yet ready to humble himself, return home, seek restoration, and face the consequences of his shameful behavior” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Luke*; 15:13-16).

➤ Desperately trying to survive, *“he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs”* (vs.15). This is the lowest of the low. He was reduced to being a beggar; willing to take any job to survive. In ancient Jewish culture, the work of feeding pigs was seen one of the most shamefully degrading jobs imaginable – especially for a Jew (who considered pigs as unclean animals)! And it paid next to nothing.

Just when it appeared as though things could not get worse, Jesus went on to describe that the son became so hungry that *“he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything”* (vs.16). He had now hit “rock bottom.” It is sadly remarkable how long a sinner can wallow in the mire and wastelands of sin – how far we can go and how long we can stay there – before we truly turn to God in repentance.

✓ **Illust:** “Sin will take you farther than you ever intended to stray, sin will keep you there longer than you ever intended to stay; sin will cost you more than you ever intended to pay.”

➤ On the brink of starvation, he recalled the life he had when he lived at home: *“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! <sup>18</sup>I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants’”* (vs.17-19). That *“he came to himself”* (vs.17; *erchomai eis heautou*) indicates he “came to his senses” (NAS) in that he realized how foolish and contemptible he had been.

In an act of genuine repentance, he recognized his sin and accepted the consequences of his sin (see Lk.3:8-14; Jn.5:14; 8:11; 2Cor.7:10). He was determined to confess his sin to his father (*“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you”*; vs.18), throwing himself at his father’s mercy (*“I am no longer worthy to be called your son”*; vs.19), and was willing to bear the consequences of his actions (*“Treat me as one of your hired servants”*; vs.19).

The “prodigal son” is a portrait of every sinner (Rom.3:10-12, 23; Eph.2:1-3). We have all spurned the love of God; we have all rebelled against the Lord’s will; we have all shown contempt for God’s holiness; we have all transgressed God’s commands; we have all squandered God’s gracious blessings.

➤ There is little doubt that, at this point in the story, the scribes and Pharisees are appalled by the son’s behavior and thinking that he is getting what he deserves. Their self-righteous and legalistic religion would lead them to conclude that the son is beyond forgiveness, and has forfeited any hope of being saved. To them, the son’s repentance would be too little and too late, and his speech would undoubtedly fall on the deaf ears of his father. In fact, they may have been looking forward to how the father would respond to the son’s pathetic attempt to come back home.

## 2. The MERCIFUL father ~ a portrait of God’s saving grace (vs.20-24)

➤ It is likely that, at this point in the story, the scribes and Pharisees were utterly applauded at the reprehensible behavior of the son. They could have imagined the father refusing to even see his son. They might have savored the thought of the father rebuking his son, saying, “You are no longer my son, you are dead to me!” They may have anticipated the son “getting what he deserved” after how he so selfishly and maliciously treated his father.

If the scribes and Pharisees were eagerly awaiting the father’s just wrath against his son, they would have been severely disappointed: *“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. <sup>21</sup>And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him,*

*and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate” (vs.20-24).*

➤ I imagine at this point that the faces of the scribes and Pharisees quickly turned from eager anticipation to seething disgust. To them, the father's response to his son was possibly more reprehensible than the son's actions. For the father did not merely receive the son; he did not simply let him return home; he did not just forgive the son; he fully and immediately reinstated his son to full sonship (see Jn.1:12-13; Rom.8:16-17; Gal.4:3-7; 1Jn.3:1)! The father, seemingly waiting/hoping for his son's return (vs.20), welcomed his son with unbridled love, affection, and compassion (vs.20). He did not wait for his son to make the full shameful and fearful walk home (vs.20). He did not relegate his son to lifelong servitude to pay for his sins. He may not have even let his son finish the speech he had prepared (compare vs.18-19 with vs.21 [some manuscripts do not have “treat me as one of your hired servants”, vs.21]).

✓ Illust: “The Prodigal had come home prepared to kiss his Father's feet. Instead, the father was kissing the Prodigal's pig-stinking head” (John MacArthur; *A Tale of Two Sons*; p.117).

➤ Jesus, the master storyteller, intentionally depicted the father as immensely loving, unashamedly merciful, and undeservingly gracious. For the father in this story is a portrait of God the Father, who does not give the repentant sinner what he/she deserves but rather lavishes upon them His love and grace.

The son had done nothing to warrant the father's forgiveness. He had done absolutely nothing to atone for his own sin. He had literally done nothing to deserve the father's love and grace.

**Rom 5:8** ~ “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

**Rom 5:20-21** ~ “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, <sup>21</sup>so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

**Eph 2:4-5** ~ “But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, <sup>5</sup>even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved” (see Eph.2:8-10; 2Tim.1:9; Tit.3:3-7)

**1 John 1:9** ~ “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

**Ps 103:11-13** ~ “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; <sup>12</sup>as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. <sup>13</sup>As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear him.”

➤ It is important to remember that the overarching point of this parable (and all three of these parables) is the immeasurable and unmerited grace of God, as He (and all of heaven) rejoices over the repentant sinner.

**Luke 15:1-2** ~ “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’”

**Luke 15:6-7** ~ “And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ <sup>7</sup>Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

**Luke 15:9-10** ~ “And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ <sup>10</sup>Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”



**Luke 15:22-24** ~ “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup>For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.”

- It may seem as though the story should end here, but it does not. Remember, the parable is targeted at the self-righteous and legalistic scribes and Pharisees (Lk.15:1-2). It is not an overgeneralization to state that they believed they were (to some degree) worthy of God’s salvation, and they believed that others were unworthy.

### 3. The HYPOCRITICAL son ~ a portrait of a self-righteous sinner (vs.25-32)

- It is at this point Jesus introduced the older son (only briefly referenced in vs.11). At first glance, the older son seems to be the picture of a faithful and loving son. But such appearances are deceiving. For the older son is a grotesque portrait of every self-righteous, legalistic, sinner:

**Luke 15:25-32** ~ “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup>And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ <sup>28</sup>But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup>but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ <sup>31</sup>And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup>It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

- This is the brother “*the Pharisees and the scribes*” (Lk.15:2) could relate to! For they are an example of all those who are very religious and yet utterly unsaved (see Matt.23:1-36). The older son had no real love for his father, and certainly no love for his brother (1Jn.4:20). He is steeped in arrogance and grossly narcissistic. He described himself as a flawless son (“*these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command*”; vs.29), and described in detail the flaws of his brother (“*who has devoured your property with prostitutes*”; vs.30), and yet the older brother was more lost than his prodigal brother.

Rather than rejoice with his father over the repentant return of his brother, the older son “*was angry*” (vs.28; *orgizomai*) and “*refused*” (*ou thelō*; vs.28) to celebrate with the family. He would not even share in his father’s joy! In fact, his anger is directed toward the father.

**Matt 20:10-15** ~ “Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup>And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, <sup>12</sup>saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ <sup>13</sup>But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?’ <sup>14</sup>Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. <sup>15</sup>Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’” (see Lk.18:9-14)

- The older brother represents “*the Pharisees and the scribes*” who “*grumbled*” (Lk.15:2) at the mercy and grace shown by Jesus Christ toward sinners. They represent the religious unsaved. The self-righteous think they have no real need for a Savior, and therefore remain unsaved. The repentant sinner, however, recognizes his/her desperate need for a Savior and pleads for the mercy and grace of God.

The older brother represents every false believer – hypocrites. They legalistically and self-righteously believe that they (at least in part) deserve or have earned God’s grace, while believing that others (who are seemingly not as righteous) have not. The older brother represents those who believe

that they are saved by their own merit, and those who resent the love and grace and mercy God bestows on sinners. They believe that they are (in and of themselves) more righteous and less sinful than others.

**Matt 21:28-32** ~ ““What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' <sup>29</sup>And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went. <sup>30</sup>And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go. <sup>31</sup>Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you. <sup>32</sup>For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.”

## Conclusion

➤ Apart from Christ, we have no goodness and no good works (see Rom.3:10-12, 23; Is.64:6). The only thing we bring to our salvation is the need for it. Salvation comes only by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone!

✓ Illust: “You may never be able to forget the years of wandering, the many sins of which you have been guilty. But that which gives peace is the knowledge that God will never recall them again [Is.43:25]. He has blotted them from the book of His remembrance, and He has done it in righteousness, for the account is completely settled. The debt is paid ...

Strictly speaking, not one of us has ever repented enough. None of us has realized the enormity of our guilt as God sees it. But when we judge ourselves and trust the Saviour whom He has provided, we are saved through His merits. As recipients of His lovingkindness, repentance will be deepened and will continue day by day, as we learn more and more of His infinite worth and our own unworthiness” (H.A. Ironside, *Full Assurance*, p. 23, 89).

✓ Illust: My Worth Is Not In What I Own

Verse 1

My worth is not in what I own / Not in the strength of flesh and bone  
But in the costly wounds of love at the cross

Verse 2

My worth is not in skill or name / In win or lose in pride or shame  
But in the blood of Christ that flowed at the cross

Chorus

I rejoice in my Redeemer / Greatest treasure, Wellspring of my soul  
I will trust in Him no other / My soul is satisfied in Him alone

Verse 3

As summer flowers we fade and die / Fame youth and beauty hurry by  
But life eternal calls to us at the cross

Verse 4

I will not boast in wealth or might / Or human wisdom's fleeting light  
But I will boast in knowing Christ at the cross

Verse 5

Two wonders here that I confess / My worth and my unworthiness  
My value fixed my ransom paid at the cross

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