

Series: Following Jesus

Sermon: Part 1 | The Gospel

Passage: Luke 15.11-32 | **Date:** April 21, 2019 – EASTER!!

Introduction – 5 min

Happy Easter Mercy Church!! If you are new to Mercy my name is Spence and I serve as the Lead Pastor here. We planted Mercy 3.5 years ago with a hope to see the love of God spread to every person in Charlotte and to the ends of the earth. Right now we meet in two locations on Sunday mornings. Providence Rd and Independence Blvd. Man we are just excited to worship together today.

Today we are celebrating Easter by celebrating the resurrection of Jesus! All morning long that's our message. Christ is the focus of our faith and his resurrection means something very good for us. In fact, we are kicking off a series on what it means to follow Jesus. When Jesus called the first disciples he said "follow me." So we are going to look at the simple but life centering call of Jesus. He still calls us to follow him. Over next 4 weeks we'll look at that. You should stick with it.

We live in a world with A LOT of half-formed opinions about Jesus. You know, he's mad when I break the rules & happy when I keep them. He's an inspirational teacher who gives you all the feel goods. Maybe you like to think of your Jesus as wearing a tuxedo t-shirt. Which says he wants to be formal, but he's here to party too. There are about as many opinions as there are people and because of that, the real Jesus can often be missed entirely.

So today, Easter Sunday, we are beginning a recovery of what it means to know and follow the real Jesus. And here's what I'm going to tell you: When you meet the real Jesus, one of two things happens...you'll either love him more than anything else on earth, or you'll hate him with all your heart. If one of those two emotions is not raging in your heart – strong love for Jesus, or hate for Jesus – if all he does is bore you or inspire you – you haven't met the real Jesus yet. The one emotion you will not feel when you finally meet the real Jesus, is apathy.

So my hope today is that We encounter the real Jesus. No better time than Easter for that. Because we need to be sure we know who this really was that got out of the tomb & how we are supposed to relate to him.

We are going to look at the most famous parable Jesus ever taught. The story of a father and his two children. The younger is a rule-breaker & the older is a rule follower. And he's going to show us that BOTH have misunderstood the father. Both think they know how the father will respond to them and BOTH are wrong. The younger is represent those who don't think they deserve God's love because they are rule-breakers. The older represents those who think God owes them love & favor because they are rule followers. Jesus is going to say the irreligious rule breaker and the religious rule follower have BOTH missed God. And in revealing this, he's going to show us why we need Easter. Why Jesus needed to go on the cross and why it is such good news he got out of the grave.

I hope you will see yourself in this story today. We are a metropolitan city in the bible belt. It means we got all kinds of younger and older sons & daughters here. That's the point of Jesus teaching it the way he does. When you see yourself in it, listen to how Jesus calls you back to God. How **HE** says you should think about God. And then respond.

In fact, I'm going to give you the chance to respond today. One of those ways is baptism. We have some people getting baptized and we want to offer you the chance to obey God by being baptized. Baptism is the first step Jesus calls his true followers to. And when you encounter the real Jesus, he calls for your full heart & full surrender, & this is that first step of saying you believe. Don't worry we've got every supply you could possibly need from hair products to toiletries to towels & clothes. But I know some of you have been thinking about it and today is the day.

Let's get into it. The parable often called the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 is actually better named the parable of the prodigal sons. Because again, both have completely misunderstood the father. Again I think you will see yourself a little in both of these. Maybe its in the apathy of both of them towards the father's love. Maybe you will see your apathy, like theirs, comes because you've just MISSED God's love. And you settled for wanting his stuff. Maybe its in your rebellion against God maybe in your conformity to his laws. Maybe you were an older brother and actually became a younger brother. Whatever it is, lean into it & hear God's word spoken to you.

The Younger Son – 10 min

11 He also said: "A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.' So he distributed the assets to them.

This is an incredibly harsh insult. It's a heartbreaking moment for the father. I mean can you imagine? The father hears his son saying "I want your stuff, but not you." This is the child who says "I hate you." But not in a moment of passion. In a settled resolved kind of way. Ya'll...this is a death wish. The son wants the father to die.

Even more amazing though is the father's reaction. Most of Jesus' middle eastern listeners would have never seen or even heard of a father acting this way. An expected response to this would have been stern rebuke and maybe a slap across the face.

Yet the Father grants the son the wish! Which, since the father is still alive, it means he gives his son his very livelihood. In fact the word for property in verse 12 is 'bios.' He gave his son his life. And he took the humiliation on himself instead of humiliating his son.

13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living.

The far country is the bible's way of saying he went to Vegas. So what happened could stay in Vegas. He went as far from the presence of the father as he could. And he lived foolishly. Bought him some Yeezys, leased a limited edition camel...and lived it up in the far country. He believed distance from the father would make him happy.

14 After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. 15 Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to eat his fill from the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything.

The son thought his way would work. But he's in a mess now. He's got nothing. He's so bad off he wishes he could eat what the pigs were eating. He's destitute. This is a picture of an individual pursuing self-fulfillment & happiness on his or her own. It starts out great...get outta home and shake off the confines of your parents...but then somewhere along the line it doesn't like you planned

- Maybe you find yourself in trouble like an arrest, or you got pregnant or something like that, got fired for cutting corners at work, your porn addiction or affair was discovered. Maybe instead its just a feeling of emptiness. Like maybe you chased it all and nothing really bad happened...maybe you are clever enough to avoid getting caught...but you still feel unfulfilled. Something isn't right. You aren't happy.
- That's what happens to star after star in Hollywood right. They discover fame & fortune and then find it is empty. Jim Carrey, one of my favorite movie stars, is often quoted as saying once "I think everybody should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of so they can see that its not the answer."¹

- But what is the answer? The answer is to come home from the far country. The far country cannot satisfy your deepest longings. Because its not home.

17 When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.

Verses 17 & 18 are a beautiful expression of what happens when someone comes to God. You Finally get honest about your life and realize your problem is not everybody else, its not your circumstances...It's not that you can't catch a break. Your problem is that you're homesick. You've been missing God. And you've got to get back to him.

So, verse 19 he comes up with a strategy based on how he THINKS the father will respond to him coming home. 19 I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers." He thinks he needs to repay the debt his father has incurred because of him. SO, his plan is to make himself a worker. This was in accordance with the Jewish teaching that if you violate the community standards for living you have to do more than apologize. You have to make restitution. He's thinking "I gotta repay my father."

Let me ask you: What strategies are you coming up with to make up for your sin? Maybe you think...When I settle down I'll make up for my past sins & get right with God. My time is

¹ Quoted in Guidepost and is said to have originally appeared on Carrey's Twitter account. However I cannot track down the original source so it will have to be loosely attributed.

now, God's time can be later...Maybe you used to think that way so now you are trying to do all the things? I see this often with people who get super involved in church activity really fast. Sometimes that's a strategy for paying God back. Listen to God's response to you if that's you:

20 So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him.

More unexpected, bizarre action from the father. THE FATHER...**RAN** ...TO THE SON!?!? This is crazy. Middle Eastern Patriarchs don't run. Children run, women maybe. Not fathers. I mean think about your dad for a second. When is the last time you saw him **SPRINT**. Not pretty. And especially this guy, he'd be picking up his robes & bearing his legs. The people listening to Jesus would be shocked. AND, it says the father embraced him. His foul smell, his tattered clothes...his earlier rejection of the father...none of that stops the father.

21 The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'

The son has to be startled by this and so he begins to lay out his payback plan. But the father cuts him off.

22 "But the father told his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast,

This is no small act. The father puts the finest clothing, puts the ring that says you are mine, puts on a feast with a fattened calf...the most expensive meat they could have. No doubt he is

putting on a kind of party that would be incredibly rare because its so elaborate. Likely the whole village is invited. The father wants the son to feel the full joy of HOME. His true home. And home is a powerful idea isn't it? The son had tried to make a home in a place & in a way he was never meant to. There's no doubt the young man had been to parties, even put on parties, in the far country. But those left him empty. Why? Because they weren't home. Just facades.

And that is us. That's why we always feel empty apart from God. We were created for GOD to be our home. For God's love to be our source of love. And Jesus is looking at his audience saying...leave the far country. Home is much better. And what is the father's exclamation?

24 because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! ' So they began to celebrate.

Jesus says in the two parables prior to this...that every time a sinner repents and allows God to bring them home, heaven throws an all out celebration. That's what this picture is. It's GOD & his angels celebrating a sinner's homecoming.

So listen: Are you the younger son? Have you gone into the far country? The message of Easter is that God is calling you home. Back to himself. How do you know he's come out to meet you? Well, if you feel lost and you want to escape it...that's the sign God is already right by your side. None of your strategies for coming to God are going to work. **In fact, when you realize that the antidote to being bad is not just being good...that's when you are ready for the message of Easter.** The message is that our sin incurred a debt just like the

younger son's did. We deserve alienation, isolation, and rejection from God because of our sin. The forgiveness the son experiences...it is costly. And the cost is not just the father, it's actually on the older brother isn't it. Because he was set to inherit everything that now he would have to split with the younger again. AND...Jesus wants you to see that he is the truer and better older brother.

- Our true elder brother came into the far country to seek and save us.²
- Our true elder brother paid the price for our sin, on the cross, in our place. Jesus was stripped naked of his robe, of his dignity, so that we could be clothed with a dignity and standing as God's children that we don't deserve.
- On the cross Jesus was treated as an outcast so that we could be brought into God's family freely by Grace. There was no other way for the heavenly father to bring us in except at the expense of our truer elder brother.

So younger son – How can you be changed today? You must be moved by the sight of what it cost to bring you home. Jesus Christ, who had all the power in the world, emptied himself of that and went to the cross to pay for our sins, so that we could come home. stop running & let God bring you home today. Let's look at what happens next. This is like Act 2 of this story Jesus tells.

² True Older Brother idea comes from Tim Keller's book *The Prodigal God* (Penguin Books NY, NY 2008)

25 "Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant.

You know you are throwing down when you can hear it way out in the field.

27 'Your brother is here,' he told him, 'and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

28 "Then he became angry and didn't want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 But he replied to his father, 'Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.'

I wonder if you, like me, feel like the son is a little bit justified in his complaint right? WHAT HAS THE YOUNGER DONE TO DESERVE THIS? HE SQUANDERS YOUR WEALTH...AND YOU MAKE HIM A SON AGAIN? I HAVE NEVER DISOBEYED YOU. He refers to his record of good deeds demanding the father fix this injustice.

Some of you are older brothers I can already tell. You relate so close to this it even SOUNDS like something you've said before. Look closer here. The older son refuses to go to a party his father is holding and when the father came out the older son rebuked the father publicly.

He actually has the same lack of respect for the father the younger son did. Because just like the younger son...he didn't want the father, he wanted the father's stuff. He just had a different strategy for getting it.

NEITHER son in the story loves the father, they use the father as a means to get the things they really love. One tries to do it by breaking the rules and the other by following the rules. The younger says I'll chart my own course and I'll enjoy God's gifts without God. I'll go into the far country. But the older says I'll conform to the moral standards so that the father will be forced to give me the stuff I want. Jesus is saying NEITHER the older or the younger want God.

See, it's so easy to see the younger son's lostness because he's in a pigsty. It's easy to spot the effects of the younger son's sin. And it still is today. The younger son's passions lead to all kinds of visibly destructive consequences. But Jesus wants us to see the older brother's sin is just as destructive. His moral conformity leads to self-righteousness, which leads to anger, jealousy, and bitterness. IF you think God owes you something for your performance, you'll look down on people. Maybe even on whole groups of people. And at the same time, you'll almost always be disappointed in life. You'll always feel like you are owed more than you are getting.

In fact, the first sign you may be an older son is that when things don't go the way you expect in life, you aren't just sorrowful. You are deeply angry and bitter. Because older sons believe if you lead a good life, you should get a good life.

Are you the older son? Are you bitter at God? Mad because he hasn't given you what you think you deserve? This is for sure

me. I spent time confessing this this week. GOD, I gave up my job to plant a church for you! I followed you down here. I did this, I did that. We got a couple of things we are trying to figure out and I'm like...COME ON GOD! I'm doing my part! And God smacked me right upside the head with this passage this week. Like there I go...using God to get what I want and throwing a fit when he doesn't.

Are you the older son? Sometimes churches are filled with older sons. Is it hard for you to forgive others? Maybe that's because you don't think you need to be forgiven. Hard to receive help from others? Maybe you don't think you need the salvation God offers. Listen to me: **You can be in the far country without ever leaving the farm.**

You can be in church and have still missed God's love entirely. And its going to be harder for you. Older son lostness is SO hard to realize. If you are sick, you go to a doctor. But if you don't know you are sick...you wont. And then you'll die. Jesus was directing this at the Pharisees who thought they knew God but had totally missed him.

You know why? You have to lay down your pride. And realize you are just as in need of the father's love & forgiveness as the younger son. See older brothers don't just have to repent of their sin, they have to repent of the sin underneath their good deeds – the sin of seeking to be their own savior and Lord. The sin of trying to control God.

See The younger son misses God because he's too rebellious and unbelieving to surrender to Jesus as Lord. The older son misses God because He's too proud to admit he needs a Savior. Irony: The older brother misses God not *in spite of* his

goodness, but because of it. He won't go into the Father's party (15:29) because "I've never wronged you."

More irony: In the end, the bad one we know is saved and the good one as far as we know is still lost. That reverses everything we know about religion. The elder son was lost not in spite of his goodness, but because of it. Jesus is against sin, **and** he's against empty religion. It was the religious people who killed Jesus! But Listen to what the father says to the older son:

31 " 'Son,' he said to him, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' " -- Luke 15:11-32

He goes out. Again. And he invites him back in. He doesn't rebuke him for his rebellion. He again extends love. And he extends it to you today. See Jesus says your good deeds will never EARN you God's love.

WHAT THIS PARABLE TEACHES YOU: **What you really need is God, and you can only get God through grace.**

You cannot pay God back for the wrongs you've done. LISTEN SOME OF YA'LL HAVE GOT to stop trying to clean yourself up BEFORE coming to God. TODAY can you just **receive** his forgiveness. The father is cutting you off and saying COME HOME! You know that's why we are doing baptism on easter?

See this is how it all connects. Watch this: Jesus died on the cross for your sin and mine. Our debt was paid. But without the resurrection it remains a gloomy picture. "See Christianity is a resurrection religion. Resurrection lies at the heart of it and if you remove the resurrection Christianity is destroyed."³ See it is the resurrection that PROVES Jesus is God. If Jesus didn't rise from the grave...none of this matters ok. None of it. Paul said that if Jesus didn't rise from the grave we are to be most pitied among all people in the world. And Baptism is our way of saying we believe he got out of the grave. And so we share in the promises of his resurrection.

Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. -- Romans 6:4

The Resurrection that we celebrate today...Listen to the promises in scripture. Just a few...that it gives to the older brother and younger brother::

- **The Resurrection guarantees freedom from sin.** Jesus is saying you cannot improve yourself. Don't use Jesus to fix yourself up. No, Jesus is saying your old self is gone. So you actually CAN have victory over the cycle of sin that you keep going through. The resurrection says you are a NEW CREATION. When we put you under the water that is symbolic of you dying to your old self & when we bring you up that is a proclamation that old

³ John Stott, cited in Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, Vintage Jesus (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 131.

Warnock, Adrian. Raised with Christ (p. 28). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

you is gone and this new you is alive under the power of the resurrected Christ.

- **The Resurrection promises God's presence with you.**

The gospel of John says before Jesus left he told them he would rise, he would ascend, and once he did he would send a helper who would be with us. God's spirit. Listen, if he didn't rise from the grave, then he isn't alive. And if he isn't alive then the spirit of God isn't with us. But friends we believe he IS ALIVE and HIS SPIRIT IS WITH US. Which means YOUNGER BROTHER: YOU DON'T HAVE TO EARN IT GOD'S LOVE...IF YOU BELIEVE IN WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE FOR YOU, THE LOVE AND PRESENCE OF THE FATHER ARE WITH YOU. OLDER BROTHER: YOU DON'T DESERVE GOD'S LOVE. BUT HE GIVES HIS LOVE AND PRESENCE TO YOU IN CHRIST! THE RESURRECTION IS THE PROMISE THAT IMMANUEL REIGNS ETERNAL. GOD IS ALWAYS WITH US!

- **The Resurrection promises death has been swallowed up in victory.**

I'm going to shrink the room here for a second. Because sometimes I need to preach to a few instead of to the many. I know some of you have lost loved ones recently. We have lost some members & And we have some facing death now. And the resurrection of Jesus promises me that death does not have victory over us. We have victory over death!

55 Where, death, is your victory? Where, death, is your sting? 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! When we rise up out of those baptism waters we don't just declare new

life...we declare eternal life! And so we grieve with HOPE! And we stand firm saying with Paul WHAT CAN SEPARATE ME FROM THE LOVE OF GOD!? NOTHING! NOT SUFFERING. NOT THINGS PRESENT NOR THINGS TO COME NOR LIFE NOR DEATH...NOTHING CAN SEPARATE US FROM THE LOVE OF GOD IN CHRIST Jesus OUR LORD!

The resurrection changes everything! Younger brother, older brother, – DO YOU SEE WHAT HE DID FOR YOU!? SEE THE CROSS, SEE THE EMPTY TOMB...He's made a way for you to come home. So come home today.

RESPONSE

1. Believe – On the morning of his resurrection, news of him getting out of the grave made Peter & John sprint to the tomb. Mary Magdalane falls down in worship at the sight of him. The disciples all begin to cry and worship at the news he is alive. And others hated him still. But there was no apathy. And if you are in here today and you've been an older or younger brother...running from God. Or if you've just had apathy, a shoulder shrug, towards Jesus...today that can change. Believe!

Romans 10.9 – If you profess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

2. Be Baptized – We've got it here. Some are already planning on being baptized. Some have been considering it. DO IT.

2 Questions: Do you believe Jesus has done everything necessary to save you? Are you willing to go wherever he tells you to go & do whatever he asks you to do?