

# **The Prodigal Father**

*By Bobby Schuller*

Well hey, He is risen. And what good news that is. It is good news. It's good news because Jesus promised us that if we put Him on, that if we put on Christ, that if you're baptized in His life, that when we die, we wouldn't taste death. That death for the believer truly is like waking up, not falling asleep. And that's what we come here to celebrate.

Something else happens when you become a believer, too. You don't just lose death, you also lose the fear of death. And listen to me, friends that dread, that fear of death that so many people have every day, nagging, kind of unconsciously, drives a lot of the bad decisions, the brokenness and the sin in our life. When you get the calm assured confidence of heaven, and it is assured, you receive something amazing from the Lord, and I want you to receive that today.

Maybe you say 'Bobby, you don't really know me.' I had a personal trainer I always wanted to come to church. He said 'if I came to church, my horns would get caught in the door. I'm not coming to your church.' He was a friend. And maybe you're like that. You're like 'you don't know what I did.' 'You don't know what I sell on the street.' 'You don't know what I said to that person, or what I plan to do next week.' Friends, I want you to know: Augustine said this – "there is no saint without a past, and no sinner without a future." God is calling you home.

And the greatest thing about Jesus, I think, is that He just loves you. He is a friend of sinners. Can I get an amen from any sinners in the house who are loved by the Lord. People like me.

Jesus shows us what God is like. Jesus did not go around hurting people, making people sick. In fact the people that Jesus got really upset about and preached hell about and all this stuff was religious people, pastors. Jesus loved the broken, the downtrodden, the hurting, the sinner, the lost. And He loved to show them what it means to be alive in God's kingdom.

In the passage I'm going to teach on today, Luke chapter 15, the pastors of the day, they were called Pharisees, see Jesus eating with a bunch of sinners and this is bugging them. And the reason its bugging them is because Jesus is very clearly a miracle worker, He's very clearly from God, they can't deny it, but He's doing things He's not supposed to do. He's eating with sinners.

Now in those days, to eat with someone, was to call them your equal. So kings would always eat separately, different classes would eat separately, and holy men would never, ever eat with sinners. And here's Jesus, maybe the greatest holy man alive, even in their view, and what is He doing eating with sinners? Even His disciples were like 'rabbi, don't you know who that woman is?'

So Jesus loved to eat and drink with them, and when this happening, the Pharisees see Him doing this and they mutter to one

another: 'this guy eats with sinners.' Everybody say mutter. You know what that means, right? They don't have the courage to say it to Him straight up, they're just saying it to one another because they're annoyed. Sensing and knowing this, Jesus looks right at them and He tells them three stories. And these stories are good news if you're like me.

The first story is the story about a lost sheep. In Jesus' day, shepherds were usually teenage boys. They're usually like 14 or 15. They'd give like a bunch of sheep to two or three kids, and these boys, to watch over these sheep was like a very soldierly thing of them to do. Their pride was on the line. It was kind of a rite of passage. And that's why you see David, for example, fighting the lion and the bear. It's like they want to earn their place in society as men by protecting these sheep. The sheep usually didn't belong to one person, but to the whole community.

And Jesus says the kingdom of God is kind of like this. It's like in a herd of a hundred sheep, one gets lost and the shepherd goes after him. You see this picture of like a shepherd boy who goes into the hills, he goes late in the night, early in the morning looking for his lost sheep. And remember, these shepherds, they know these sheep by name, right? Like he has a name for the sheep. Maybe his name is Lamb chop, I don't know. Like Lamb chop, where are you, Lamb chop! Where are you, girl?

And then it's like early in the morning he finds Lamb chop. He throws him over his shoulder, he's like BAAAA. And he's like I found him!

He comes running down the hill, its morning, and the whole village is excited, not only because the shepherd is safe, but he found Lamb chop. And everybody gets excited. They're jumping up and down. And there's this whole party. And Jesus looks right at those Pharisees and He says, I tell you the truth. There will be more joy over one lost sinner than over 99 righteous people. That there will be celebration in heaven over the one man or the one woman who comes home to the Father.

So it goes from 100 then to ten. Jesus says the kingdom of God is also likened to this. It's like a woman who had ten coins. Now it could be that this woman was poor and she had ten silver coins. It was more than likely a part of her headdress. So in those days, women didn't have wedding rings, they had like a headdress and it would usually have ten jewels or sometimes coins that would signify the Ten Commandments. So they'd wear this thing on their head.

And He says it's like this young woman who was just married, and one of the coins goes missing. So she's wearing this thing out, right? She wears it to the shop, she wears it to get her kids, and of course people are saying what people said – where's your coin? Where did that coin go? Where's the coin? She goes, I'm looking for it.

And this woman, she goes looking for this coin. She searches her house, and finally she finds it! She goes out to all her friends, she's like guys, I found it! I found it! I finally found the coin. I've been looking for it forever. It's finally complete.

And you know what Jesus says? It's like the kingdom of God is incomplete without our lost brothers and sisters, without you, its incomplete. It's not the same without you. He's looking at the Pharisees when He says this. Why aren't you looking for that lost coin? Why aren't you searching for it? This is what God does to lost sinners. He goes after them, searching for them.

See the Pharisees cannot imagine a God like this. But Jesus is God and He shows us what God is like. Can I get an amen? He searches. When we're in our most lost, when our most desperate, He comes looking for us to comfort us and to lead us.

And finally, so He goes from 100 to ten to one, or really two, this story, famous of the Prodigal Son. It really should be the story of two sons. And it goes like this. Jesus then says that the kingdom of God is like this. There's this son and maybe the son and the dad have not been getting along. He's the younger son, and there's an older son, too. And like the older son is kind of the rule follower. He's the stern one. He's the faithful one. The young son is the little bit of the rebel. He's the problem kid, the black sheep of the family.

And one day, maybe there was a fight or something, the young son finally just goes to his dad and he says, I want my inheritance. Now in those days, two thirds would go to the older son, and one third would go to the younger son, and you get it when the father passes away. And it's a face culture, so it's all about honoring elders and honoring your

parents. And so when this younger son looks at his father and says this, it's a grave insult. He's basically saying to his dad, I wish you were dead and all I want is my money.

Now most fathers in those days would have whipped that boy good. They would have beat him down. They would have given him a good licking. I sound like I'm from the south, but not really. But this father, no, he doesn't get upset, he doesn't yell, he doesn't disown the son, he does it. He sells a third of his estate, and he gives it to the son in cash.

The son takes all that money and he goes to a far away land, and he spends it on booze, women and gambling. And he finds out, in the end, he has nothing. And there he is, a prince in rags, dirty, with nothing, starving. And this is an important part of the story, he is feeding pigs. Now for Jews, this is a big deal. It's the dirtiest animal, signified with sin and hell. He's feeding pigs, and he's looking at their food and thinking I wish I could eat their food, but they won't let me.

And then Jesus says, and then he came to his senses and he just said to himself, what am I doing? If I go back to my father, he has plenty of hired hands. He won't take me back as his son, but he'll hire me and I'll work and I'll have three square meals, and I'm done with this. I'm going to go eat crow.

And so you might remember when you were a kid, when you were a teenager you got in trouble, you'd rehearse a speech like what you're

going to say to your mom or your dad like on your way home. You're like 'dad, look, I just borrowed the keys. I'm sorry I didn't ask you.'

So this kid, he's coming home and he's rehearsing this speech over and over. And the speech is 'father, I've sinned against heaven and against earth and against you. I'm not fit to be your son. Please just take me as a hired hand.' 'Father, I've sinned against heaven and earth. I'm not fit to be your son. Just take me as your hired hand.'

And then, as he's walking home, you get this picture that the father is almost like standing on the porch looking. That every night as the sun sets before he goes to bed, he looks to see if maybe today his son has come home. If maybe his son, who he loves, is alive, and this day, on the horizon against a setting sun, he sees his son in the distance walking closer.

And the Bible says that when he sees his son, friends, he doesn't walk, he doesn't jog, he runs. He runs to his son. And remember those days, they're wearing gowns, like robes, like the choir. He has to pick it up and run! He's running to his son, and his son immediately is like father, I've sinned against heaven and he just mid sentence, interrupts him, throws his hands around him. He's like bring him a robe! Put shoes on his feet! Put a robe on his back. Put a ring on his finger. This son of mine was dead and now he's alive. Wow.

You see the son wants to be in this weird middle ground. He's like that's it, I'm going to be like my older brother. I'm going to follow the

rules. I'm going to do everything that's right. And I'm going to be a hired hand, I'm going to earn it back. It's going to take years, but I'm going to earn it back. And the father says no, you cannot earn this. You are either my beloved son with all my authority and all my power and all my love, or you're in a distant land. You have to choose. You can't live in my house and just be some disowned hired hand. Not in my house. I love you. I love you. You're my son.

And that's what God says to you. You're His daughter, you're His son, you don't have to do anything to earn it. It's a free gift. Man, He is waiting on the portals for you to come home. He can't wait to show you the purpose and life and adventure that lays before you if you just trust your soul to Him. Isn't God good? He's just so good. Isn't He? He's just so good.

Oh, by the way, and he kills the fatted calf. That's a big deal. Now a fatted calf is like.. that's good. That's the good stuff, man. That's like once in a lifetime rich people get to have a fatted calf. It's like for a wedding. This is like prime rib plus lobster on like a silver platter on a Louis Vuitton tablecloth presented.. like it's just like the most baller awesome meal ever.

And so this party begins and everyone's invited from the whole town, right? And then the brother's out there, and he's like coming home after a long day of work. He's so faithful. He's been working so hard for his dad. And a servant comes out and his older brother looks at his

servant and he sees this party going on, there's all these people celebrating, and music, and eating, and drinking. What is going on? It looks like a wedding. He looks at his servant and says he says Joe, (I don't know if his name was Joe), what is going on? And Joe says, my lord, you haven't heard, your brother has come home and your father has killed the fatted calf.

And I sort of empathize with this older brother. This is not the first time that younger brother has been in mess up. And it's like.. you just see him, he's like no. No. And it's like he pulls out a shovel or something and just starts digging. Starts working on stuff. He's not going into that party. And the father, again, runs out to his older son and he says, my son, come celebrate with us. And he looks at his dad, maybe tears in his eyes, he says I have been faithful to you, old man, my whole life. I've done everything you've asked me to do, I've always honored this family, and this man sells your stuff, spends it on booze and prostitutes, and you welcome him home? You killed the fatted calf for him? I never even got a goat! And I've been faithful my whole life. It actually says that. I've been faithful my whole life.

The father, and notice the older brother says this son of yours. He's disowned him. It's not his brother anymore. His father then says to the elder son, my son, everything I have is yours. You have been faithful to me. But this brother of yours, and that line is so important. You see in those days, the missing bit is that that older brother, when the younger

brother left, part of being the big brother is to go save your little brother. It was that older brother's job to go after him and find him and talk some sense into him and bring him home. Culturally we don't see that. But that's what was happening. And the father says this brother of yours. It's almost like the older brother relished it when he left. He finally got to say see I told you. See. It's almost like he needed a younger brother to be a sinner so he could be proud of his own righteousness.

And the father says this brother of yours who was lost is now found. Come and celebrate with us. And you know what happens? Neither do I. The story ends there. And Jesus is looking right at the Pharisees. He's looking right at them. The elder brothers – why aren't you going after your little brother? Why aren't you going after him? Why aren't you bringing him home?

Wow. The moral of the story is this: not that we should be like the younger brother or the older brother, but we should be like the father. That we should have this kind of heart. That we should be seeking after the lost coin, the lost sheep. That we should be home in him. That we should be where God is. Not off in a distant land, not in exile, not starving, not being without, and not being proud and self righteous, but at home, spiritually alive; filled with the spirit of God, with agape love, overflowing with His power and purpose. That should be us.

And so today, its Easter and I want to invite you to be that person. Maybe you're here today and maybe you need to come back to the Lord.

Maybe you've been in a distant land. Or maybe you're caught up in self righteousness. Or you're a good person but you just don't know the Lord.

No matter who you are, I've given you 15 minutes to think about it. Now is the time. If you want to come back to the Lord, if you want to come home, I want to invite you to stand so I can pray with you right now. Just stand where you are. If that's you. Thank you. Is there anyone else? Look, becoming a believer takes courage because living as a Christian takes courage.

With everybody looking around to stand up, this is an important moment for you. If there's anyone else, I want to invite you now. Jesus says anyone who acknowledges me before men, I'll acknowledge before my Father. Anyone who denies before men, I'll deny. Just stand now, if that's you. Thank you. Come on, stand. We want to celebrate you. All right.

Good, let's all stand together with our brothers and sisters who stand to acknowledge the Lord, and we're going to pray this prayer together. Hold your hands out like this, like this, say this after me: Jesus Christ son of God (AUDIENCE: Jesus Christ son of God), have mercy on me, a sinner (AUDIENCE: have mercy on me, a sinner). I am the beloved of God (AUDIENCE: I am the beloved of God). Fill me with your Holy Spirit (AUDIENCE: fill me with your Holy Spirit). I love you (AUDIENCE: I love you) in Christ' name I pray, (AUDIENCE: in Christ' name I pray) amen (AUDIENCE: amen).

If you prayed that, you became a believer. Your home is heaven.  
Give us six months. Come to this church and watch what God will do in  
your life. And write it down in your Bible's. That's a cool thing. We love  
you guys. Let's give them a hand.