

Luke Chapter 15 v 11 - 32

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 March 2020

Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] George is getting in the mood for Easter, I think. He arose, he arose. We've got a little while to wait yet, George, before he can start singing Easter hymns, I think, though. We rejoice, of course, in the truth that our Lord Jesus Christ is risen from the dead every day of the year, not just at Easter.

We're here to worship God, here to set our minds and hearts upon him, take our minds away from perhaps the busyness of the week, of the day, of our circumstances and situations.

What do we think of when we think of God? Here's what the psalmist has to say. Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him with joyful songs.

Why should we do any of those things? Why should we worship God? Why should we shout for joy? Why should we come before him with joyful songs? Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us. We are his.

What do we think of ourselves when we come into the presence of God? This great God, this true God, this creator God. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

[1 : 18] We are those who are under his care, created and made by him. Those who receive from his loving hand every good gift, every blessing. And so our first hymn reminds us of this truth that God made us, each one of us.

We are unique. Why are we unique? Because we've been made by God, the creator God. I'll praise my maker while I've breathed. Number 14, let's stand and sing together.

We can not only worship God and praise him, but we can also talk with him. He is the God who communicates with us and us with him. There's that relationship that he is our God.

So let us pray together and let's bring before our God the praise he deserves. Oh, Father in heaven, you are indeed our maker and creator.

We look around us and see a world of splendor and beauty. We see a world which is designed, a world which has clearly got the fingerprints of you upon it.

[2 : 29] For there we see majesty and glory. There we see great massive mountains and powerful waves. There we feel the strength of the wind, Lord, around about us.

We see that we live in a fathered world, a world which has been sustained and created by God. And when we look at ourselves, and though, Lord, we still find our bodies a great mystery, there's still so much we don't understand and comprehend, yet, Lord, our bodies show that we are fearfully and wonderfully made.

How can we understand the majesty of an eye that can see and an ear that can hear? How can we grasp how it is that when we cut ourselves, we heal, and when we are fed, food strengthens our bodies?

These are all amazing things that show that, oh, Lord, our God, we are not accidents. We are not merely a bunch of chemicals or minerals tied up in skin, but we are those who have been made by God.

And more than that, you've put within us a soul, a spirit, Lord, so that we can ourselves be creative and designing, so that we ourselves are imaginative, so that we ourselves appreciate beauty and music and song.

[3 : 43] Lord, all these truths concerning who we are point to you, that you have made us for yourself. We're not drifting through this universe on a speck of a planet pointlessly, but, Lord, we have been created by you and for you, that we might not only enjoy what you've made, but that we might enjoy you, our Heavenly Father.

Enjoy your love. Enjoy your help. Enjoy your nearness. Enjoy that relationship with you as children to a loving, perfect, heavenly Father.

And yet, Lord, we know that that relationship that you created us for has been marred and damaged and ruined by sin. Our sin, our selfishness, our pride, our greed.

Lord, those attitudes of our heart towards you and towards one another that bring war and famine and heartache and suffering and loss. And, O Lord, we thank you that you did not leave us in the mess of our own creation, but that you came to us in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

You came to rescue. You came to reverse the downward slide. You came, Lord, to restore us to you, the God who made us and who loves us.

[5 : 00] We thank you that, Lord Jesus Christ, through your life and especially through your death, in suffering for our sin and taking the punishment we deserve, we thank you that you have transformed the lives of every single person who puts their faith in you.

You grant us forgiveness for all our sins. You take away the guilt and shame of our past. You fill us with your Spirit that brings us the confidence to call you Father.

Father, and you cause us to know that we are loved with an everlasting love. Thank you, Father, that these gifts are ours now. They're open. You gladly, as it were, invite us to take and to enjoy your grace and love.

We thank you that they are only the beginning of all that you have in store for us, not just in this life, but in that life to come. Thank you that throughout this life and throughout eternity, we can enjoy you and praise you and delight in you.

We pray that even this morning, as we draw near from perhaps a busy or a difficult or a strained or weak, we come, Lord, to set our eyes upon you, to lift our eyes heavenward and see again that we have a God and a Father who loves us, that we have one who has saved us, that we have one who is our helper in all times.

[6 : 20] O Lord, we pray, be with us now and bless us in this time together and bring glory and praise to your dear Son, in whose name we ask these things, Jesus Christ the Lord.

Amen. Amen. Thank you. Well, a couple that we haven't really introduced, but lovely to have Chris and Graeme Hilton with us.

Chris and Graeme both were very, very faithful in serving the Lord here for several years. Graeme as an elder and Chris in all sorts of things, particularly mums and toddlers.

And it's lovely having them back. And because they're back, everything's going wrong. So they feel as if like they're missed. So the OHP's not working. We have to change all the hymns.

What else isn't working? We've got the wrong reading on the board. So Chris and Graeme, we miss you. It all falls apart since you've been here. It is actually very normal. Yeah, that's the truth.

[7 : 18] So we're not going to read now from our Bibles on Amos. So if you spent the last half an hour trying to find Amos in your Bible, morefully sorry, we're going to read from Luke. So Luke and chapter 15.

And if you've got one of the church Bibles, then that is page 1048. Page 1048 in the church Bible. Luke chapter 15.

As John said, a couple of weeks ago, we looked at the first two of three parables. That's three stories that Jesus told which have very real truth about them, truths contained within them concerning God and our relationship to him.

And we're going to look at the third of them, which is the longest and probably the most famous. Before we do that, we're going to read. So chapter 15. First of all, we'll read the first three verses.

Okay? So verses 1, 2, and 3. Just to give us the context. That's the situation in which Jesus is teaching. And then we're going to go straight over to verse 11. Read to the end of the chapter. Now, tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus.

[8 : 24] But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Then Jesus told them this parable.

Verse 11. Jesus continued. There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, Father, give me my share of the estate.

So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got everything together, set off for a distant country. There squandered his wealth in wild living.

After he'd spent everything, there was a severe famine in the whole country. He began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him to the fields to feed pigs.

He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare?

[9 : 25] Here I am starving to death. I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants. So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him.

He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

But the father said to his servants, Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it.

Let's have a feast and celebrate. This son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate. Meanwhile, the eldest son was in the field.

[10 : 27] When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him, What was going on? Your brother has come, he replied. And your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.

The elder brother became angry, refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, Look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.

Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours, who has squandered your property with prostitutes, comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him.

My son, the father said, You are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. We trust the Lord will help us to understand his word and apply it. Please turn back then to Luke 15 and to these parables, these three parables, particularly this final parable, this final story.

[11 : 48] Well, John told us a little bit about how he had been lost at a certain time and about another man who had been lost and through his life. And I've lost.

I've probably been lost. Well, I haven't really been lost because like all men, we just take scenic routes to get to places which aren't necessarily the way that the sat-nav tells us or the map.

But we're never really lost, are we? Because obviously we get home eventually. So it doesn't really count. But anyway, that's a different thing. I'm not going to talk about that. But six years we've been in Whitby, myself and the family, six years.

This Sunday is the anniversary, the sixth anniversary of God's goodness to me and to you in bringing us together as pastor and people. And I'm very thankful to the Lord for that and for your love and prayers.

But in the last six years, there's three things that I have lost which have been real value to me. Four, of course, if you include my mind. And... Okay, fair enough.

[12 : 49] Two years ago, while I was walking down by Saltrick Bay, I lost my mobile phone and dropped into the sea. I went back to find it. Couldn't find it twice. I went back. A few months ago, I lost my watch.

It was an expensive gift that Mel had bought me for my birthday. And I searched everywhere for it. I had no idea where I lost it. Searched to the car, searched to the house, searched to the garage, wherever I thought I might have left it, but I couldn't find it.

Haven't found it. Still lost. There was one item that I lost that I did find. And that was several years ago while I was on holiday, or we as a family were on holiday.

And joining us on that holiday were my parents and my brother, my younger brother. And we were visiting a water park and we lost John. Now, it wasn't entirely John's fault that he was lost because we had placed him in the care of his grandfather and my brother.

And somehow, he had become lost from them. And for an hour, Angela and I frantically searched this park. And it's a big place. I mean, several acres in size.

[13 : 53] And we were beside ourselves searching for him. We went to the park office and said, can you put out a message to all the sort of staff telling them to look out for a boy of 12 wearing spathers, which since there was well over 1,000 or 2,000 people in the park, probably about 150 people would have had that same description.

At last, John was found. He'd been completely oblivious to the fact that we had been panicking and searching for him. He had no idea that he'd ever been lost at all.

Now, Jesus' parable here in Luke 15, verses 11 and following, is titled by the translators. It's not the original. Remember, these bold titles, as it were, that break up the paragraphs are put in there by the English translators.

They translated it and put the parable or given it the title the parable of the lost son. And as John reminded us, it's probably the most best known of the parables of Jesus.

And it's known by a more common title, the prodigal son. Do you know what prodigal means? Because up until recently, I had no idea what prodigal meant.

[15 : 09] I always thought prodigal was somebody who sort of rebelled and ran away. That was the prodigal son, somebody who ran away and got into trouble and came back or never came back in that sense.

But that isn't what prodigal means at all. You're probably all very clever compared to me and you all know that prodigal means wasteful. Prodigal means to spend without restraint. It means to be careless with your finances.

Did you know that? Some nods, some no. Well, I didn't know that anyway until just recently. And we can understand why that title, the prodigal son, has been attached to this parable because the youngest son was just that.

On two occasions, we're told how he squandered what he'd been given. There in verse 13, he set off for a distant country there, squandered his wealth in wild living and then the elder son describes him as somebody, verse 30, this son of yours who squandered your property.

And indeed, that's the chief, that's the characteristic of this son. He is the one who squandered what was given him. He wasted what was given him.

[16 : 19] But is he really the central character of the story? Is it just about him? Well, there's a great deal of detail about his life and about what happened to him, his adventures, we might say.

But just remember who this parable was spoken to by Jesus. Remember back in verse 3, Jesus told them this parable. Who? The Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

Jesus tells them these three parables to make them stop and think about themselves and their attitude towards God and their attitude towards these sinners.

these prodigal people. And in fact, when we read the story, we realize that it's to Jesus, sorry, that Jesus is wanting them to think very seriously about themselves and who they are in the story.

And they're clearly not the prodigal son in the story. They're not the father in the story. Clearly, they are the oldest son in the story. The oldest son who we're told muttered about his brother.

[17 : 24] and grumbled about his brother. Just as these Pharisees had grumbled and muttered about the sinners who had come back to the Lord.

I think it's fair to say that the oldest son is often ignored in this story. And I must confess that when I've preached this parable before, often I've concentrated upon the son and upon the father, the younger son, and perhaps even at times when we've read the story, we've stopped at verse 24.

And that's the story. We've left off the last seven verses. And we can understand why the story of the son is so dramatic, isn't it? It's so exciting. There he is. He's away. And we can use our imaginations to imagine the things he got up to and how he wasted his life and the parties that he had and the friendships he had and all these sort of things.

And we can imagine in there going down and having to feed the pigs. Now, remember, these people were Jewish, so a pig was an unclean animal. It was an animal that they had nothing to do with.

And so for him, it was the worst degradation. It was the lowest, the low. It was really in the bottom of the food chain, as it were, to feed the pigs. And he's so hungry, he wants to eat the slop that the pigs eat.

[18 : 43] And we can imagine how he comes back and clearly he's barefoot and sort of ragged and walking back and we get, there's the father there, we're told, running towards him to welcome and embrace him.

Somebody who probably smelt rather a lot of pigs and manure and all sorts of horrible things and the party that took place and so on. We can associate with that. We can enjoy that. It's a wonderful, good news story.

And also, I think, for some of us, we can associate with that story. We can put ourselves in the place of the prodigal son. We can say that we're like him. We were people who went through years of teenage rebellion.

Perhaps we got into a downward spiral of mistakes and failures before at last hitting rock bottom and then coming back to God with repentance and receiving and enjoying the ecstasy of his forgiveness and his love and the new life that it means to be a child of God.

And for the tax collectors who almost certainly as well as the Pharisees heard this story, they could easily associate themselves with this restored son, this lost son who's now found and has received the mercy of God.

[19 : 57] I wonder, just as an aside, are you still, like the prodigal son, are you still running away from God? Are you still far from him? Are you still living that life where you're just concerned about yourself?

How have you yet come back to God? Have you returned to him? Can you see just how willing he is to forgive you, how willing he is to accept you, how willing he is to re-clothe you, as it were, take away the stench of your sin and give you the beauty and the perfume of his forgiveness and grace and so on.

Let me urge you to do that if you haven't. However, for us to finish the story at verse 24 is to cut the story short. It's to miss out what Jesus is getting at because this bit, this verse 25 to 31, 32 is so important, vital.

This is the punchline, as it were, that Jesus is delivering to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. When you read a book, an ordinary book, a novel, you wouldn't think to read out of the 10 chapters just nine and then just say, well, I've read all the story, put it aside.

No, you'll probably, if you're hooked on that book, you're going to think, I want to read it to the end. It's at the end, all the threads come together. The theme of the story, the actual purpose of the story hits you.

[21 : 19] It's a conclusion that really is the important bit, isn't it? The last chapter is the most important. So in these closing verses, the closing chapter, as it were, of this story, we need to see that Jesus is applying these things to the Pharisees, to the religious leaders and he's applying them with pressure and with power upon them.

You see, the reality is this, yes, the younger son was lost but is now found. The sad truth is that the older son is still lost. Still lost.

Doesn't appear to be, maybe, as we read the story. He isn't the one who's travelled off to another country and turned his back on his father and taken his money and wasted it.

He's not the one who's become homeless and destitute. He's not the one who's in trouble and put himself in a place at the very bottom of the pit. He seems to be quite respectable. He seems to have his life in order.

He seems to be the one who is right and all is okay and on the surface it all looks like his life is swimming and there's no problems there but he's the one who's actually still lost at the end of the story.

[22 : 29] He's lost because he's cut off from his father not physically but in a relationship wise. He's cut off from his father and separated from his father.

And what Jesus wants to point out to these Pharisees here and what he wants to point out to you and I is this, that everything on the surface may appear fine and we may even be religious if I can put it that way.

We're here in church after all. Here you are. You're a good boy aren't you and a good girl you're in church. Everybody else that you know isn't in church on a Sunday but you are so, you know, you can feel pretty good about yourself and life seems to be okay and you seem to have things under control but the truth is that this, you are lost because you have not got a relationship with God, your Heavenly Father.

You are lost because you are separated from Him. You need to be restored to a right relationship with God. God. And throughout the New Testament and in fact throughout the Bible what we see is that men and women are lost because of their sin and because of their lifestyle and because of their attitude and they are cut off from God and the consequences of that immediately impact their lives where they are in their relationships with others but especially impact their eternal life.

Impact the fact that they are under judgment. Peter certainly was thinking of these parables and the parable of the lost sheep when he wrote to the Christians in his first letter.

[24 : 03] He says, for you were like sheep going astray but now you've returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls.

there's clearly a broken relationship isn't there between the older son and the father and you can see that there in verse 28. The elder brother became angry and refused to go in so his father went out and pleaded with him.

There's a break isn't there? He won't come to the father. He may just be a matter of meters away from the father compared to the matter of hundreds of miles that his brother was but he's just as far away.

What do we say to miss by an inch is as good as a mile. Many of us think that we're very close. We're very near. We're almost but we might as well be a thousand miles away because we're separated still from God.

He's broken his relationship with the father. He has no relationship with him. He has no friendship with him. He doesn't enjoy the love of the father. He doesn't enjoy the embrace of the father.

[25 : 15] He doesn't enjoy the mercy of the father. But how has he got to that situation? How has this son become so lost? How has his relationship with his father become so broken?

Because ultimately he has a false view of his father. his father. He has a completely wrong, skewed idea of what his father is like.

He's totally mistaken about the very character of his father and therefore he does not relate to his father as he should. And the attitude he has to his father, this view of his father, the way he considers and looks at his father has created with him a great deal of animosity to his father.

He is angry when it says the elder brother became angry and refused to go in. Who is he angry with? It's clear he's angry with his father. Yes he hates his younger brother but he's angry with his father.

He is full of animosity towards him. It's not because his father has mistreated him. It's not because his father hasn't cared for him. It's not because his father has been harsh to him.

[26 : 22] Many of us have a wrong idea of what God the father is like. And because we've got a wrong idea and view of God our heavenly father, this view has prevented us from enjoying him and being right with him and being restored to him.

And like this elder brother, we believe that God has treated us badly. we think that God hasn't been fair to us. We think that God has not been good to us.

Our view of God is that he is, as we shall see, like the elder brother views God. First of all, he sees his father as a master instead of a father.

A master rather than a father. Notice what he says when his father comes out to him, please come in, please come back, please be reconciled, please come and enjoy the good things of this party.

And he says, look, all these years I've been slaving for you. He sees his father as his master, not his father.

[27 : 35] Slaving for you. His perception that his father was a harsh taskmaster. He was a boss, stern, demanding. What do you think of God in that way?

Do you think of God as being someone like a boss? He's always standing over you, checking on your work. He's always expecting things of you that you feel under a constraint to do, but you feel as if you just cannot please him.

He's only somebody who cares about you keeping his commandments. He only cares about you doing the right thing. He has no real concern for you personally. He's someone to fear.

Isn't that how some people, perhaps even you, think of God in that way? He doesn't really care about me. He just wants me to do good things. He wants me to do right things. He's a stern and he's a harsh master and I feel like my life is all about trying to keep him happy, trying to please him.

Good, I'm glad to hear that. That's how the son saw his father, but that view of God is completely and utterly wrong.

[28 : 51] He is our creator, he's our maker, he's our provider, he's the one who tenderly cares for all our needs. Remember how Jesus just two chapters earlier in chapter 12 tells the disciples, do not be afraid little flock for your father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

The father, and he's been speaking about how the father provides for our needs and just as the grass grows and God provides the flowers and the beauty so he provides our clothes and just as the birds of the air are given food to eat so God provides all the food that we need, our God is a heavenly, loving, gracious, generous father.

In fact, if you think that God is always wanting something from you then you are totally distorted in your view. God is always wanting to give. He doesn't want anything from us because there's nothing that you and I can give him that he wants or needs.

Rather he longs to give us. He longs to give us what we cannot earn. He longs to give you what you cannot deserve. He longs that you might have what you can never achieve.

God is not a mean master but a loving generous father. father. And do you see how the son's distorted view of his father produces a distorted view of himself.

[30 : 15] Look how he thinks about himself. I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. You see, if you give a wrong view of God then you will always have a wrong view of self and a wrong view of others.

Everything has to begin with how we see God and our relationship to him. Everything has to do with our relationship with him. If we relate wrongly to him then we relate wrongly to ourselves. We relate wrongly to others as well.

Do you see what he says? I've never disobeyed your orders. Yes, you're demanding and you're harsh but I've never done anything wrong. What does that smack of?

Arrogance and pride. He's full of self-righteousness isn't he? In his achievements. I've been the perfect son to you in spite of you being a harsh and slave trading father.

He sees himself as better not only than his brother but better than his father. So the problem is if we begin to view God as harsh and a boss as treating us sternly and only concerned about what we do that we start comparing ourselves to others and to him and we start to feel good about ourselves and we start to put God down and others down.

[31 : 38] That's exactly what the Pharisees and the teachers of the law thought. They thought they were really good. They thought these people who got it wrong and made mistakes and cocked up their lives they were people who God had no time for and they were beneath the pale as it were.

But they themselves were cock a hoop. They were look at me. They would stand on the street corners and they would say to people look at me look how great I am. In fact Jesus told a story about that a bit later on in Luke where he says a Pharisee went to pray and he stood by himself and prayed God I thank you that I am not like other people.

Robbers and evildoers, adulterers or even this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get. Jesus goes on to say those who exalt themselves will be humbled.

You see if you view God as being unkind, unloving, then what you are actually saying is that you are more loving and more kind. One of the great falsehoods in our day and society is this, we know better than God.

So when God tells us that he created the world and everything in it we can say no you didn't God we know that it was by mistake and evolution and over millions of years so we know better than God.

[32 : 59] And when God says he love is to be enjoyed in the perfect gift of marriage between one man and one woman and we say no, no, no, love can be enjoyed in any relationship between a man and a man, a woman and a woman and then we know better than you God.

And if we say that men and women are created biologically as different and that you cannot become a man if you're a woman or a woman if you're a man, we say no, no, you can change your gender if you don't like it, you can make yourself, we can become gods of our bodies so that what you have made us to be we can change that we know better than God.

Here's a secret, if you didn't know it, God knows best. God knows best. How dare we? God knows how can we know better than God?

When we say I know how to live my life and my life is to be lived for the material possessions of this world and my life is to be lived for my family and my life is to be lived for my enjoyment and my life is to be lived that I might be richer and my life is to be lived so I'm happy.

And God says the way you live your life is to put all those things to one side and live for me wholeheartedly and enjoy the good gifts that I have by making me number one, we say we know better.

[34 : 24] Let's look at the evidence though just for a moment. Look at the evidence in the world around about you dear friends just for a moment. Look at the people who seem to have the world at their feet and have lived for themselves and yet whose lives are destroyed, whose marriages and families are ruined.

Think of that dear and I'd say this with all I hope tenderness Caroline Flack, woman who had the media at her feet, had everything that she could possibly want, was hailed as this great presenter on TV and yet behind the scenes she takes her own life because none of those things, none of those things could ever give her peace.

isn't it about time dear friends that the world, and that begins with you and I started to say, God you know best, God you know better than me and I'm not as great as I think I am.

Isn't the world in which we live and those who are so very vocal in declaring their atheism and saying we do not need God, are those people really saying I am so clever, look at me, I am so smart, smarter than God.

And you see because this man had a wrong view of God, the father, of his father, he had a wrong view of himself but then what also he saw his father as therefore is this, he saw him not only as a master instead of a father but a miser instead of a father, verse 29 and following, yet you never gave me even a young goat.

[36 : 10] In other words, very small, almost not worthless but you know, cheap in one sense, the cheapest thing that you had, the least important thing you had, just a goat, a little goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

In other words he's saying, father you're a miser, you're mean to me, you're penny pinching and you're tight, you've withheld from me the good things that I deserve.

And the reason why he has that view of the father is because of how he's treated his brother. But this son, verse 30, of yours who squandered your property with prostitutes comes home and you kill the fattened calf.

The fattened calf was the prize animal as it were, kept for special occasions. So imagine if they're going to have a great big party, a birthday party, they'd bring out the fattened calf.

This was the best of the best, the prime meat. I'm sorry to vegetarians, I apologize. The prime cuts of beef on this animal, all the juicy steaks and so on.

[37 : 14] And you've given it to him who's wasted all your money, who doesn't deserve it, and me who deserves the fattened calf and deserves these good things. You wouldn't even give me a little squiggly goat.

we think we think that other people have been treated by God better than us. We think that God has not been fair to us.

We think that God has been unkind to us. We think that God has let us down, that he hasn't given us what we deserve. Besides, we've done so much, we've been so good, we've lived such nice lives, we've never hurt anybody.

Surely we should never have cancer, surely we should never fall ill, surely we should never be bankrupt, surely we should never lose our job, because God, you see, I've been such a nice person, good things should happen to me because I deserve them, but when they haven't happened, it must mean the faults with you.

How many of us have felt at times in our lives hard done to? Why was I beautiful? Why was I handsome?

[38 : 20] Why was I rich? Why was I popular at school? Why was not clever and smart? Behind the veil, as it were, there is a resentment against God.

The psalmist, he wrote a psalm about how he looked at other people and how he felt hard done to. And he talks about how he nearly slipped, he nearly lost his whole view of God and his faith.

He said, for me, my feet almost slipped, I nearly lost my foothold, for I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. And he goes on and talks about how the wicked seem to have no problems, how the wicked seem to have no difficulties, and they scoff and mock against God, and they say, how would God know what I do?

Does the most high know anything? This is what the wicked are like, always free of care, they go on amassing wealth, and perhaps you like that have looked out upon the world, and you've seen how people who have got celebrity status, and people who have got these fantastic vehicles, and cars, and everything seems to be well for them, they have no consideration of God, no thought of God, you say, well what's the point?

And that's what the psalmist says, he says, surely in vain I've kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence, all day long I've been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishment, in other words he's known the sense of his sin, and his guilt, and his life is difficult, and hard, he says, what's the point of following God?

[39 : 44] If all these people can follow God, and they can get away with it, and have such a nice life. Two things to remember dear friends, when we compare ourselves, and what God has done for others, with what he's done for us, we only see the surface of a person's life.

You've no idea what is going on underneath, you've no idea of the sufferings, the heartache, the trials, the problems that they've gone through. You only see the surface. Dear friends, we must be so careful that we don't judge God, or judge others by just a surface view.

Secondly, remember this, the grass is always greener on the other side, until you get to the other side. Instead of being ungrateful, instead of seeing that God has not treated you well, dear friend, be grateful with what God has done for you.

Count your blessings, name them one by one, and you'll be surprised at what the Lord has done. What's the way to counter unhappiness? What's the way to counter dissatisfaction with life?

It's to count the blessings, to see what God has done, to see the blessings that he has poured out into your life. Instead of always looking at the negative, look at what he's done positively, you'll find that they are overwhelmingly greater than whatever suffering or difficulty.

[41 : 04] Remember this, envy is a cruel mistress. The person who sets their life and lives by envy will always be unhappy. The oldest son's mind was twisted by his pride and his greed.

His view of his father meant that he actually missed out in enjoying all that the father would have gladly given him and wanted to give him and would have shared with him. Notice how his father responds, verse 31, my son, you're always with me.

In other words, I'm here for you. I've never left you. I never cast you out. I never mistreat. Everything I have is yours. You could have had a kid. You could have had a fattened calf. You could have had anything.

That's mine. I want you to have enjoyed but you've missed out on it because you viewed me wrongly and you never ever came to me. But you counted me as a miser and a master.

See, the Pharisees and the religious leaders of their day missed out on enjoying God and the father's generosity. They missed out on it so much. But you and I don't need to.

[42 : 15] You don't need to miss out on the father's love. You don't need to miss out on the good gifts that he gives. You don't need to continue to wander in a lost position.

In this story there are two sons. They were both lost. They both needed to repent. To both of them the father came with open arms to receive them and to bless them but only one enjoyed and only one was found.

which son are you? Let's sing our final hymn together. We're going to sing 537.

537. Come let us sing of a wonderful love tender and true out of the heart of the father above streaming to me and to you. 537.

The last verse says this. Come to my heart oh thou wonderful love. Come and abide. Can you make that a prayer? Can you sing that meaning it? Can you sing that humbly?

[43 : 29] Realizing that your heavenly father is good. 537. Let's stand and sing. Jesus says this.

Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

Amen.