

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

The Parables of Jesus | Luke 15:11–32 | October 25, 2026

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Central emphasis

The father is the central character of this parable. Jesus reveals the Father's mercy, grace, patience, and steadfastness through His dealings with both sons. The younger son's open rebellion and the older son's hidden self-righteousness must both be understood in light of the father's character.

The kingdom: the rule, the reign, and the work of Christ

Although Jesus does not introduce this parable with “the kingdom of heaven is like,” Pastor Patrick emphasized that it is still teaching about the kingdom: “the rule, the reign, and the work of Christ.” Salvation is possible only through the kingdom and its work. The younger son's restoration is not merely a moving family reunion; it illustrates the kingdom at work, bringing one who was dead to life and one who was lost to be found.

Pastor Patrick contrasted an approach that focuses only on making converts with Jesus' command to make disciples. To make disciples, we must behold the Father's character and learn to respond to His kingdom's work with repentance, worship, and rejoicing.

The setting: three parables, one correction | Luke 15:1–2

Tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to Jesus, while the Pharisees and scribes grumbled: “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” This complaint is the key to the lost sheep, lost coin, and two sons. Jesus is correcting the religious leaders' response to the gracious work of God.

- The lost sheep: the Son seeks and saves lost sinners.
- The lost coin: the Spirit illuminates and reveals the truth to lost sinners.
- The two sons: the Father receives lost sinners.

Together, the parables direct attention to the work of the triune God and to the rejoicing that accompanies the recovery of the lost. The Father's response—not merely the younger son's departure—is the point of this final parable.

1 | The younger son: rebellion and repentance | Luke 15:11–24

He acted as though he were not a son

The younger son demanded his portion of the inheritance, even though the inheritance was his father's provision, not something he had earned. In effect, he wanted the father's possessions without the father. His departure to a far country made his rejection visible: he wanted to live contrary to his father's instruction and away from his influence.

Pastor Patrick connected this rebellion to Genesis 3 and John 3:19–21. Sin wants God's gifts while resisting His authority and remaining in darkness. The son squandered what had been given to him in

reckless living, eventually finding himself hungry and tending pigs—an especially shocking picture to Jesus’ Jewish hearers.

He came to recognize his need

Through famine and hunger, the younger son remembered the abundance of his father’s household. He planned to return and ask to be treated as a hired servant. His expectation was still shaped by what he might do to regain a place in the household. But the father’s welcome exceeded everything he anticipated.

The son confessed his sin and unworthiness; the father restored him to the honor and privileges of sonship. “This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:24). Pastor Patrick pointed to this as the work of the kingdom.

2 | The father: mercy, grace, and steadfastness | Luke 15:20–24, 31–32

Mercy and grace toward the younger son

The father did not treat the son as his rebellion deserved. He gave him the inheritance, and when he returned, the father saw him while he was still far off, felt compassion, ran to him, embraced him, and kissed him—before the son finished his confession. He did not merely allow him to serve; he publicly restored him with the robe, ring, shoes, and feast.

Pastor Patrick distinguished mercy from grace: the father withheld the harsh response the son deserved and gave him what he had not earned. He stressed “grace upon grace” and the joy that spread through the household because the lost had been found.

The Father’s work in drawing the lost

Pastor Patrick traced the father’s influence through the younger son’s journey. The famine, the hunger, and the memory of the father’s generous household served to draw him home. He connected this to John 6:44: sinners do not save themselves; God works to draw them to Himself. The father’s goodness—not the son’s merit—is central.

The same character toward the older son

The father also went out to the older son, who stood outside refusing to celebrate. He patiently entreated and instructed him rather than answering anger with anger. The father remained consistent in mercy, grace, love, and steadfastness toward both sons.

3 | The older son: self-righteousness and opposition | Luke 15:25–32

The older brother represented the Pharisees and scribes. He stayed home, claimed never to have disobeyed, and believed his service entitled him to what remained of the father’s possessions. His anger revealed that he, too, prized what the father could give more than the father himself.

Pastor Patrick emphasized that the older brother’s sin is especially dangerous because it hides beneath outward obedience. “Staying” was not the same as obeying from the heart. The younger son recognized that he was unworthy; the older son believed he deserved everything. He would not call the returned son “my brother,” but “this son of yours.”

The contrast is striking: the father rejoiced while the older son grumbled; the father welcomed the lost son inside while the older son remained outside. Just as sinners drew near to Jesus, the Pharisees held back and complained.

4 | The open ending: an invitation to repent | Luke 15:31–32

Jesus ends without telling us whether the older brother joined the feast. The Pharisees and scribes are meant to see themselves in him and respond. The father's final words are merciful: "It was fitting to celebrate and be glad." The invitation remains open to those who think they need no repentance.

Patrick's culminating point was that the Pharisees were not merely grumbling about sinners. They were grumbling against the kingdom—against the work of Christ in receiving sinners. They claimed to honor the Father while rejecting the Son who revealed Him, and claimed to love righteousness while despising the mercy of the righteous God.

Responding to the rule, reign, and work of Christ

- Recognize our need for repentance, whether our sin is visible rebellion or concealed self-righteousness.
- Behold God as He reveals Himself in Scripture: merciful, gracious, loving, patient, and steadfast.
- Rejoice when God's kingdom is at work drawing lost sinners to Himself.
- Seek to make disciples, not merely converts—people transformed as they learn to reflect the Father's character.

Questions for reflection

- Do I desire the Father Himself, or chiefly the benefits I hope to receive from Him?
- Where might outward obedience conceal pride, resentment, or a sense of entitlement?
- Do I rejoice when God extends mercy to sinners, or do I grumble at His grace?
- How does seeing the rule, reign, and work of Christ change how I understand repentance and discipleship?
- How can I reflect the Father's mercy and steadfast love toward others this week?

Closing thought: Both sons needed the father's mercy. The parable calls us to behold the character of God, repent, and join the celebration of His kingdom's work.