

How much does God love you?

Luke 15:11-32 (Prodigal son)

3 Lessons About How God Celebrates Salvation

1. God celebrates salvation unconditionally
2. God celebrates salvation extravagantly
3. God celebrates salvation genuinely

How much does God love you?

Introduction: Weddings are some of most extravagant celebrations in the world. The average wedding in America costs around \$30000 with some weddings going into the millions. One of the biggest weddings in recent memory was the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton. The wedding was extravagant. They rode in expensive cars and were pulled by horse carriage. Her wedding ring worn by Princess Diana is worth \$500,000. They even had the Royal Air Force fly by. There was truly nothing like it.

Why do people spend so much money on weddings? It's because a wedding is perhaps the biggest event in a person's life. It is a huge change in a person's life, it is an extremely joyful event and God's biggest grace that both Christian and non-Christian can experience.

When great and wonderful things like a wedding occur there is a great cause for celebration. This is what we see here in the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

A greater event than even a wedding is the salvation of a soul and yet we often don't see huge momentous celebrations here on earth when people get saved. In fact, many people tend to go with their lives when they get saved let on celebrate it. Yet, *God* celebrates. To see this we need to look at the context.

Context: The parable of the prodigal son is one of the most well known parables told by Jesus. Because it is so detailed compared to other parables and has such a heart warming feel to it, it is easily remembered.

For us to dig as much detail as we can about this parable let's start with the context as usual.

At this point of telling this parable, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem determined to accomplish his mission to die on the cross to save many. It's Luke's language of using words like determined and "set his face to go to Jerusalem" in Luke 9:51 which shows Jesus dedication and focus to save. Nothing was going to stop Jesus.

As Jesus heads towards Jerusalem, many crowds and all kinds of people started to follow him including tax collectors and Pharisees. This is where we are in Luke 15. If you see in v.1, because tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes began to complain and criticize Jesus saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." As to imply that if Jesus were so righteous, he wouldn't be hanging around sinful people.

So Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and scribes by telling them about three parables around the fact that God *loves* it when sinners find it salvation which is why Jesus *wants* sinners to be around him. So the first parable in v.3-7 Jesus tells about a person who lost 1 out of 99 sheep and finds him and then rejoices. Next the parable of the lost coin in v.8-10 where a woman loses 1 out of 10 coin so searches the entire house for it and then finds it and rejoices. At the end of both of these parables Jesus concludes by saying how heaven rejoices, and how the angels rejoices. Now we come to the third parable of the prodigal son and we see how *God* rejoices when a sinner is saved.

Parables are typically stories Jesus tells to tell a *singular* point A single lesson. And this is the *main* point of the prodigal son that God rejoices when sinners are saved. Now this particular brings in other important themes such as repentance and religious hypocrisy, but they all center around the main lesson that God *celebrates* when sinners are saved.

So today in this passage we will be looking at 3 Lessons About How God Celebrates Salvation

1. God celebrates salvation unconditionally (v.11-16)

v.11- And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. V.12- 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.

Here is a man with two sons which the younger asked his father to give him the share of property, his inheritance now. Now, typically you only receive your inheritance when the one passing you an inheritance, typically your parents, die. Yet this young man had the audacity to ask for it *now*. This was the first insult to his father, basically he’s saying to his dad, “dad, you’re dead to me.” I mean imagine your child said that to you. We have many families at Fil-Am Community church and so the fathers listening can feel this understand this better than I can. The money, the sweat, the blood, the love that you poured into your child, and then he slaps you in the face saying, “die, so I can get your life insurance now.”

And this is the same that our God feels. Only believers are the children of God let’s make that clear. Jesus even says that unbelievers are the children of Satan. However, in a very general sense, in this way only, God is a father to all only in the *sense* that he created all people. He’s not a father *relationally* to unbelievers that is reserved for believers, but he is a father to unbelievers as well only in a *creator-creation* sense.

The point is that this is how God feels *every* day unbelievers continue to disbelieve in him. God gave them *everything*. Literally everything. Everything a father has given to his child, God has given that *infinite* fold. God gave them the father who gave them birth, God gave them the very ground they walk on, God gave them the very air they breath, God gave them the very body their soul lives in, and gave them created their soul as well. Now imagine the insult a father feels when their son says, “die and give me money” and multiply that insult times infinity when unbelievers insult God every day with their sin.

v.13- 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.

This is the second insult the son inflicted his father with. Using that inheritance and wasting every single bit of coin, down to zero in the bank account, and *wasted* it all in reckless living. Later in v.30, his brother notes that he spent it on prostitutes. Basically this man went to Vegas and acted like the heathen he was. Imagine your son going to some far away country like Brazil and spent all your money that you saved him for him since he was born on partying, alcohol, drugs, and prostitutes.

v.14- And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. V.15- So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. V.16- And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

So as his bank account hit zero, it happened that there was a famine and unless he worked, he would starve to death. So he hires himself out to someone to do some real dirty work which is feeding pigs. Now, we may not think that feeding pigs is so bad, but to the *Jews* under the Mosaic law, pigs were prohibited and unclean. And so to the Jews this is the worst imaginable type of work that one could do in that society. To us, we often hear warnings to kids saying, “if you don’t go to school you’ll be a garbage man” so I guess a garbage man is something for us to kind of understand what the Jews thought of a man feeding pigs. But at the same time I hear garbage men get paid pretty well so not the same.

I would argue that this man’s job was worse than a garbage man because his work paid so poorly that he had to eat in the from the same pods the pigs ate to survive. The economy was probably so bad that even if he had training or education he still couldn’t get a job which is what some people who graduated are experiencing now. On top of that it says no one gave him anything meaning that he barely had his basic essential necessities of life. Barely and food, clothing, or shelter. This is a parent’s worse nightmare to see their child in such a destitute situation isn’t it? You can imagine this man on all fours like the pigs in the mud, eating nasty filth from the pods possibly even garbage, with torn up stinky clothes. That was the outcome of this man, complete humiliation. At the back of all our minds we can’t help but think, “had he stayed with his Father, he’d have a comfortable home, nice clothes, delicious food.”

With all of these awful insulting things this man did to his father, none of it would stop his father from embracing with full arms and celebrating as we will see in the next verses. God’s celebration of salvation is unconditional. He’s not concerned with what one has did in their past, all he cares is that their saved.

Illustration: So I know this might be getting silly because I mention Jollibee almost every single sermon but I finally went to Jollibee last weekend. I wanted to celebrate a year without going to Jollibee! But as the weekend approached some events came about that would seem to possibly derail me from going! First my cousin wanted to come and she got off in the afternoon so that would mean we would be arriving their late in the day. Second, rain was forecasted and that would increase traffic time by a lot. I was starting to wonder should I go? Is it really worth it? But with all these flaws and issues coming up, I decided that I still wanted to go. My joy to come eat Jollibee was not in the flaws of driving all the way there but solely that I just like Jollibee. No conditions, I just want Jollibee.

In a far greater magnitude God's joy for a lost soul saved is not based on any sin, faults, or past wrongdoing. He's not worried about the future mistakes a saved will make in the future either, all he cares about is that souls are saved, no conditions, no questions asked. That's God's unconditional joy right there.

Application: If you are a believer listening God wants you to know that God is always joyful that you are his child. Don't let any sin make you afraid from approaching God. Some times as Christians when we sin we're to ashamed to approach God and we put ourselves in timeout to pay for our sin by shaming ourselves. That's wrong. Jesus paid for it all on the cross! God is always pleased to have you as his son because of what Jesus did on the cross for you!

2. God celebrates salvation extravagantly (v.17-24)

v.17- But when he came to himself he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough, but I perish here with hunger! v.18 - I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "father I have sinned against heaven and before you. v.19- I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." V.20- And he arose and came to his father.

The turning point in the story. One of the best (or worse) words in the Bible "but"! He finally began to realize how much better he had it when he was with his father. He notes that his family's servants have an abundance of food, whereas he barely had enough to survive. So he plans to go to his father and acknowledge his wrong, his sin against him and heaven, realizing he sinned

against God. And not even asking to return as a son but simply as a servant because his father's hired workers were in far better condition than he was.

This is the very definition of repentance. The Greek word, "metanoia" which we translate as repentance as a change of mind leading to action. This is exactly what happened here. The son's mind of pride and sinful pleasure *completely* shifted to humility and acknowledgement that he was wrong all along. His mindset was so humbled that he asked for the bare minimum of returning not as a son but as a hired worker.

He followed up on his change of mind, and plan by actually going back to his father.

Illustration: I have many friends who have heard the gospel and understand it clearly from me. And when times got real rough for them like real rough as in prodigal son rough, instead of realizing their wrong and turning to Jesus, they continue to blame everything else and continue to reject Jesus. Until they realize it in their mind that their sinful and they need Jesus, they will *never* turn to him.

2 Cor 7:10 says,

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

Just because someone becomes sorrowful does not mean they will have a change of mind and turn to Christ, i.e. repent. Thankfully in this parable, the young son has godly sorrow and repents.

Continuing v.20- **But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.**

So his father sees him from a long distance. Someone said online that you can see someone if you're both at sea level at about 2.5 miles. Almost 5 miles if it's just the head. Now his father is probably older and we don't know how good his eyesight is nor if he and his son were looking at each other at sea level. However what I do know is that my eye sight is not very good and that there's no way I could see someone 2 miles let alone even 1 mile away. To me far is about a football field or 100 yards. So whatever in your mind you imagine being far away use that. To me I imagine the father seeing his son at about a football field distance which is far for me and running towards him. I mean this man is not walking, but running. You ever hear in malls or commercials,

“walk don’t run”? Well for this father it was “run don’t walk”! I mean if you’ve ever seen NFL rookies at the combine doing 40 yard dash, this father was probably doing something like that! He was running!

Some commentators say that because running for an older man was shameful as it would exposed his legs that the man had no shame because he had so much love and compassion for his. I think that’s true. I mean in video games, your character is always running and yet nobody looks at you weird. But if I were to start running all around Tysons mall everyone would be looking at me weird.

But note that it’s the *compassion* that made the father run to his son. I don’t know about you but I never ever run in public social settings. I don’t run at Whole Foods, I don’t run in my apartment, it looks silly. I can only remember a handful of times where I have run in those kind of places. One, was when I was a little kid I was at Best Buy and they had Mario Party on the Nintendo 64 as a demo, and they had the game hooked up on around 9 gigantic TV’s so huge that the entire store could see it from almost any angle. The demo was in the middle of the store so I ran to it. And then after playing it, Bowser showed up and I ran away scared. The second time, again as a kid I happened to have some quarters and I was at the laundromats with my dad and they had Mortal Kombat. So I played some quarters, and then I ran away because I was terrified of the game.

Both of these extremely rare scenarios did I run in a social setting. Something *special* made me want to break the norms of walking and running and for me it was the excitement. That’s what it was for the father, compassion. This wasn’t just some every day occurrence picking up groceries. Nor was his father indifferent about seeing his son. No, seeing his made him *run* and it was because of the compassion felt.

And as soon as he got to his son he hugged him and kissed him displaying the great *love* he has for his son. The *relief* that his son is not dead! You often see in movies of parents especially mothers kissing their child relentlessly after they got lost or kidnapped or something. This is what the father felt love and relief that his son is here! He must’ve been worried all this time that his son was in a pit or something.

v.21- 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.”

His son recited what he was going to say but he left out the “treat me as your hired servants” part. We often forget what we want to say don’t we? I think even before he even had the chance to say that his Father was just so happy he barely paying attention to what he was saying and he said in v.22- **Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.** V.23- **And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.**

To understand the significance of these items, let’s put them in modern context. We don’t often see people wear robes anymore, any not only that his father said *best* robe which would denote the son’s position in life. The only think I can think of that would come close to that in a modern context is a Canada Goose coat. So that’s the first thing his father does is put a super nice fancy Canada Goose on him to denote his status in life. This is very reminiscent of Jacob giving his son Joseph a super fancy colorful coat which his brothers were very envious of. Next, his father gives him a ring which would convey the son’s authority. In today’s world that’s basically a Rolex. Third, his father gives him shoes which in that world would mean that he’s not a slave but a freeman. So for the younger crowd here that’s the Jordan’s and Yeezy’s of the world. On to top it off the father tells his servants to bring out the fattened calf and kill it so they can eat and celebrate!



(Slowly) One does not simply, kill the fattened calf. The fattened calf was looked carefully after and was only slaughtered for very special occasions. So basically the father took out his son to some fancy Korean BBQ. Or for us at Fil-Am that would be the entire \$500 whole lechon pig.

So his father put the Canada Goose on him, the Rolex, the Yeezys, and brought out the Lechon all in one day. If that is not celebration I don’t know what is. And for the sons listening to this, don’t now go and run away to a far country so your dad can do this to you too, I don’t think this will always work!

v.24- **For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to celebrate.**

The father's reaction when his son returned was not anger, skepticism but pure love, joy, and elation! Pure celebration! It's one thing when we prepare for a big celebratory event. Like a wedding or graduation we plan that months even years in advance. But this father was so happy and joyful that he did all this *immediately* with no hesitation. I've never in my life seen anyone celebrate in such a grand spectacular way with such spontaneity.

This is how God celebrates when a soul is saved. He throws a *big* party. In heaven it is a bigger celebration and explosion that July 4 or New Years at NY with the big ball dropping down. It is bigger than the royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton. It is all of the biggest celebrations you can ever imagine all at once and *instant* as soon as a soul is saved. It's not just a "yay!" Or the clapping of hands. It is a full ecstatic, excited, elated, happy, stupendous joy! The greatest event in a person's life is when he gets saved so don't be surprised that God throws the biggest party in the world for it!

Illustration: The greatest joy one can experience after being saved is obviously getting married. But actually I want to talk about birthdays as a kid. As a young kid, I remember coming to my home one night all dark and then BOOM out of nowhere the lights pop on and everyone screams happy birthday! Then I have to blow these candles on this delicious looking cake, while everyone sings me a song? And then on top of that there's music, amazing gifts, fun games, and even a creepy clown. All of this for my birthday? It's such a shock it feels overboard, it feels *undeserved*.

When a soul gets saved, God throws the biggest luxurious party in ever in heaven because his joy is not small, it's *ecstatic*. God is *overjoyed* when a soul gets saved.

Application: This can only lead us to wonder, do we still have that excitement when someone gets saved? As Christians we need to be wise, even have healthy skepticism, but we must also have incredible *excitement* when someone gets saved! If God parties this hard when someone gets saved do I feel the same way? Do we still get excited and exhilarated when we imagine the thought of our friend, coworker, neighbor, family member coming to Christ and being saved? Let that excitement light a fire in you to go and share the gospel in this dark world!

3. God celebrates salvation genuinely (v.25-32)

v.25- Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

So his older son was in the field working hard milking cows and whatever you do on a farm. And as he came near the house he started hearing music and dancing. He hears some bumping Christian trap music, Christian rap, 91.9, Lecrae etc and people are dancing!

v.26- And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. V.27- 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.” V.28- But he was angry and refused to gin in.

First I just want to note that if we heard partying at our house all of a sudden, wouldn't we want to come in and join the fun? But after hearing the news of his brother's return and the dad bringing out the lechon to celebrate that his son is safe he got angry and refused to go in. We can see here the older brother's envy of the younger brother.

Continuing v.28- **His father came out and entreated him, v.29- 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. V.30- But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!”**

So his father comes out try and encourage him to join in on the party and celebrate. But the older son responds with jealousy. First he says that he never disobeyed his command. That's pretty hard to believe, I don't know any kid that has obeyed their parents perfectly. But even if that was true which it probably isn't, the older son complains that he never even had a young goat which is far cheaper than the fattened calf to celebrate with his friends. He continues to complain by

calling his brother, “this son of yours” not even acknowledging him as a brother and stating his past faults of using prostitutes and his father unfair use of the fattened calf for such a degenerate younger brother.

Here are some problems with this. Instead of celebrating and rejoicing that his brother is back safe and sound, he complains like an angry little kid standing outside the house arms crossed and pouting his lips. He treats his father, like a worker complaining to his employer for a raise, rather than family. He’s focused on being rewarded for doing good and complaining that another has been rewarded for doing evil. He doesn’t even call his brother, brother but instead “this son of yours” distancing himself away from his brother as family. Finally, he brings up his younger brother’s fault from the past to demean him. You can see the anger and envy oozing out of the older brother.

He doesn’t care that his brother is safe and sound he only cares that his work is properly rewarded. That is not love but envy and hatred. It is the same attitude that Cain had over his brother Abel.

And you can’t help but feel that Jesus is targeting the Pharisees here and he is. This whole conversation started with the Pharisees complaining that Jesus is around sinners, yet Jesus is telling them that God rejoices when sinners are saved that’s why he is around them! They think a relationship with God is an employer and employee relationship where only good employees earn salvation when the *true* relationship with God is parent and child where it’s not about doing good works but about an unconditional love and care between father and son.

In fact this is what we say in the final verses, v. 31- **And he said to him, son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.** V.32- **It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”**

Interestingly, the father doesn’t rebuke the son but instead gently affirms that everything he has is his. God’s offer of salvation and inheritance of eternal life is *always* available to unbelievers all the time. Instead they don’t believe this. They don’t believe God is a loving father and instead continue to believe that they must earn salvation, treating God again not as a father but an employer. And finally the father again affirms the main point of this entire story that it is fitting to celebrate and be glad because his brother is not dead but found and alive. The parable ends with the older brother failing to discourage his father’s celebration.

That's God's joy over lost souls. You see when God celebrates salvation he does it genuinely. He's not concerned with your sinful past nor when others bring up your sinful past when you are saved. His celebration is *genuine*!

Illustration: I'm sure at some point in time, as kids we have all forced our parents to buy something like a toy. One day as a little kid I wanted my mom to buy me a video game. We were at Target and I kept nagging her and nagging her until she bought it. She wasn't happy at all when she bought it. In fact she was angry and I remember crying after she bought it that's how mad she was! I mean I was a bratty kid who didn't deserve a game so I don't blame my mom that's all on me but I thought parents are supposed to *enjoy* and *love* buying gifts for their child! That's what I thought as a kid,

But when God celebrates salvation, he doesn't do it grudgingly. He doesn't celebrate but is actually mad deep down inside like a kid forcing their parents to buy them a gift like I did. He's not faking his emotions like a stingy neighbor giving you plenty of food while smiling but is angry on the outside. No his celebration is truly real. Truly genuine.

His party is not fake like the fakeness that religious hypocrites live. Looking righteous on the outside but inside full of anger, hate and doubt. They have no genuine concern or joy when someone gets saved because they themselves aren't saved. All their concerned about is working in hopes they will earn heaven.

Illustration: This happened to my wife. Her cousins who are actually fake Christians took her to church for a couple of years. And when Maybelle actually got saved by the Lord, instead of rejoicing and celebrating, their attitude was very prideful and their response was basically, "been there, done that! You're late! We've been Christians for a long time!" They pride themselves in calling themselves Christians yet live sexually immoral lives. They didn't care that a soul was saved just like the older brother didn't care that his younger brother got saved.

That's not God's joy. It's not fake and cannot be stopped by fake Christians. It's genuine. No matter what your past is, no matter what the devil complains to God about your sinful past, none of that can stop God's genuine joy over the salvation of a lost soul.

Application: If you are a Christian, remember how God's party is *genuine*. You don't need to cover up your sinful past by doing good works, like putting on makeup. Like religious hypocrites do by cleaning the outside of the cup but not the inside. If you are in Christ, God sees you how you *truly* are. He sees Christ, because when Christ died for you, he gave you his perfect

righteousness. That's *why* God's celebration is genuine, because God is celebrating that Christ saved you and *nothing* can stop that! Not your good works, not your bad works, not Satan accusing you, nothing can stop God's party in heaven when you got saved! It is a *true* and *genuine* salvation!

Gospel: If you are not a Christian..