

Jesus brings rescue to the lost

1. Intro [SLIDE]

- Incredible story in the news 2 weeks ago¹
 - Good news story too!
 - Story of a girl who was reunited with her family 10 years after being swept away in the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami
 - The tsunami was triggered by a massive earthquake off Sumatra island, and killed 230,000 people in 14 countries
 - The girl was four when she and her brother were swept away by tsunami waters from her home
 - Her mother said she and her husband stopped searching after a month, and believed she was dead ... until this June when the girl's uncle spotted a girl who looked like her
 - They found out that the girl had been taken care of by an elderly woman in a nearby district
 - And so three weeks ago and after 10 years apart ... the family were reunited
 - Her mother said "My husband and I are very happy we have found her"
- What an understatement!
 - Can you imagine the **joy** this family must have felt to be reunited with their daughter once again
 - They'd presumed she was dead ... for 10 yrs ... but she'd returned to them alive
 - They're hearts would've been bursting with excitement at the return of this girl they thought they'd lost forever ... but now had been found
- The parable that we're looking at tonight from Luke 15 ... Jesus wants us to understand the complete joy it is for our Father in heaven to welcome home a sinner who was lost ... but now has been found
- However ... it's not as simple as that
 - It's a parable with a twist
 - What we'll see as we go through is that Jesus is going show us how he brings rescue to the lost
 - And as he does that ... he's going to fully deconstruct and reconstruct our preconceptions about
 - who are the lost that need saving and
 - how it is they're saved

¹ <http://www.smh.com.au/world/indonesian-girl-reunited-with-family-10-years-after-boxing-day-tsunami-20140807-101pfg.html#ixzz39m9TP6WZ>

- In doing so ... he challenges our idea on what Christianity is all about

2. Context [SLIDE]

- If we're going to understand the story properly we need to understand the context
 - To do that we need to look at v1-2
- See there in v 1-2 Jesus preaching and teaching about the KOH > crowd around him
- Different groups of ppl there listening
- v1 > tax collectors and sinners
 - Tax collectors
 - Known for ripping ppl off, pocketing extra cash
 - But the main reason these guys were so despised ... because they were helping finance the Roman army that was suppressing and ruling over Jews
 - Imagine China takes over Australia ... and your next door neighbour has just bought the right to exact taxes from you to pay for the Chinese army
 - You'd hate them for it wouldn't you?
 - This is why the tax collectors were so despised
 - And there's also the 'sinners'
 - In biblical times ... this was a whole class of society
 - People who were looked down upon and considered sinners because they were diseased, deformed, disabled
 - Ppl from professions of ill repute like prostitutes
- Got tax collectors and sinners there listening to Jesus ... but there's another group of ppl there too
- Pharisees and teachers of the Law
 - Muttering amongst themselves about Jesus saying *"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*
 - These guys are at the opposite end of the spectrum – socially, religiously and morally
 - Pharisees & teachers of the Law
 - Super strict > super religious > know the scriptures off by heart > pray all the time
 - These guys are the top guns of religion > best of the best
 - Compared to these guys ... even the most devout Christian is doesn't even stack up
 - Imagine a Christian who

- gets up at 5am to read Bible and pray
- every t-shirt you own has Jesus' name on it
- Fish sticker on their car > FB profile pic
- Even if you do all that ... you're not even in the same ball park as the Pharisees and TOL
- So as we take a look at this parable in Luke 15 ... we've got to keep in mind who's listening to this parable and who Jesus is speaking to
 - Tax collectors & sinners
 - Pharisees & TOL

3. The Lost Younger Brother [SLIDE]

- In v11 the parable begins with a father and two sons
- And it's the younger son who goes to his dad and demands his father give him his share of his inheritance
- He was basically saying "Dad – I wish you were dead, give me the cash, I'm getting out of this place and go and live it up"

- So the sons sets off with all his stuff and a big wad of cash ready to live the high life
 - He squanders it on reckless living

- **Illustration**
- Like a boy from Wee Waa, asking his dad to sell the part of his property that had been set aside for him ... moving to Sydney and then proceeding to spend all that money on going the races, visiting prostitutes in Kings Cross, abusing drugs, and drinking himself into a stupor

- It's the ultimate slap in the face to his Father – isn't it?
 - He's rejected the relationship he has with his father
 - He's treated his inheritance with contempt
 - He's only interested in himself and gratifying his hedonistic desires

- Now his situation is made worse by a famine in the land
 - And he's forced to get a job on the local pig farm feeding the pigs
 - The son is now at the lowest point in his life
 - For a Jew - who considered pigs to be unclean animals ... feeding pigs would have to be the most degrading thing in life he could do
- He was down and out ...
 - So hungry he wished he could eat the food he was feeding to the pigs

- Jesus goes on in v17 ...
- The son is at a point of desperation ... he finally came to his senses
 - He realises he's lost and needs to return to his father
 - He's got no choice, he's got no money ... he realises he must go home or his will die
 - And so he resolves to go home to his father in humility and repentance
- Reminds of a quote by Mark Twain ...
 - *"When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in seven years."*
- Son realised he'd stuffed up
 - He realised he didn't deserve to be taken back by his father
 - He realised that he had sinned against his father ...
- **The Father**
- How does the Father react
 - Reject his son?
 - Say "I told you so"?
 - Banish him to the furthest part of the farm to get to work?
- Here's where it gets shocking ...
- v20 we see the father saw him while he was still a long way off
 - The father had been patiently waiting for his son ... looking out for him ... hoping that he would return
 - When he saw him ... he was so filled with compassion for his lost son ... that he **RAN** to meet him and threw his arms around him
- When he gets to him the son starts saying how he didn't deserve to be treated like a son ... but the father does exactly the opposite
 - He put the best robe on him which would have the fathers robe
 - He put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet
 - These were unmistakable signs of the son being restored back into the family
- In effect the father is saying
 - "I'm not going to make you work to pay off your debts"
 - "You're not going to earn your way back into the family ... I'm simply welcoming you back in"
- And in addition ... the father throws a party to celebrate

- This is no ordinary party ...
 - Not just a couple snags on the BBQ type party
 - He kills the fattened calf ... an animal that would've been set aside for special occasions and worth a fortune
 - This is a massive party to celebrate the return and restoration of a son
- Despite all that the son had done in sinning against the father in the past ... we see the father so filled with love and compassion ... that he forgave his son and welcomed his son back joyously
 - *v24 - 'this son of mine was dead ... but now he is alive. He was lost and now he is found.'*
- **Implication**
- Of course Jesus tells the story to show us the amazing grace and love of God (who is represented by the father) ... and how he welcomes back the repentant sinner
 - It shows that even though the son deserved to be cut off from the family ... the father showed him grace and love and forgiveness
- For the sinners and the tax collectors sitting there listening to Jesus ... this parable would've given them great hope
 - Because Jesus is speaking about them > they know they're the younger brother in the story
 - They know they'd turned their back on their heavenly father > lived life their way without reference to God
- But for the prostitutes and drunks and thieves and sinners and all those that the religious establishment looked down upon ...
 - Jesus is saying ... when you come back to him ... despite what the Pharisees and TOL might tell you ... your heavenly Father will welcome you home
 - There's no sin too big that your Father in heaven isn't willing to forgive and receive you back into his eternal family
 - And when you do ... God is so overjoyed ... he cracks open the Moet and Crown Lagers and he celebrates your return
- How wonderful that message would have been for them!!
- **Application**
- Unless you've grown up in a home where you've known nothing other Jesus as Lord and Saviour ... that's what it's like for all of us

- Because what this parable shows us is God the Father delights to welcome home those who turn back to him
- If you 're a Christian here today ... it's because God has acted like this towards you
 - He's come to you in love and grace
 - And despite your sin ... he's welcomed you home and invited you into his heavenly feast
- If you don't yet consider yourself a Christian and you're wondering
 - Could God ever forgive me
 - Would God ever welcome me into his kingdom
 - Can I ever experience to grace and love of God
 - Answer is an overwhelming yes
 - He wants you back
 - He will forgive
 - He will love you and show you his grace and mercy

4. The Lost Older Brother [SLIDE]

- The parable isn't just a story about a wayward son ... it's a story about two sons
- And the second son we are introduced to more fully in v24-32
 - He's the diligent son
 - He stayed loyal to his father
 - He didn't take off to fulfil he's own desires and wants
 - He stayed on the property, working hard for his father
- He's coming in from his work overseeing the servants that day and he hears music and partying
 - He's thinking ... "what's going on? Is it Christmas? Did I miss the memo?"
 - One of the servants tells him his younger brother is back and dad's throwing him a party
 - He like "What? You can't be serious! Are you kidding me?"
- And he's **furious!**
- He thinks his brother deserves to be punished ... he doesn't deserve a party!!
- What his anger shows is just how alienated he is from his dad
 - he doesn't share in his father's joy ... he refuses to go into the feast

- he has no love for his brother ... he just calls him "this son of yours"
- In v29 he speaks to his father it's with contempt and disgust - "Look!" = "Look, you!"
 - "I've worked myself to death and earned what I've got, but my brother has done nothing to earn anything and yet you welcome him home and give him all the privileges of being a son again"

- The problem with the elder son is he thinks that by remaining on the farm, working hard and not running off ... that he's the one who deserves to be honoured by his father
- What he doesn't realise is that his inheritance is based on being a SON of the Father ... not because he worked hard for it
 - Inheritances aren't earned ... they're given by grace to those who are in relationship with the Father

- The sad thing about the older son ... is that despite growing up on the farm ... the reality is ... he's a million miles away from the father
 - He's just as lost to his father as his younger brother once was

- **Implication**
- This would have been a massive smack down for Pharisees and TOL
- Because the elder son in this story represents them
 - Remember back in v1-2 these are the guys who don't like Jesus welcoming and hanging out with sinners
 - They would've started off feeling smug and self-righteous as Jesus talked about the younger brother
 - But in talking about the elder brother ... Jesus is exposing their hearts

- The Pharisees and TOL thought that being in a right relationship with God was all about ...
 - Be good > follow the Law > be moral > be pious
 - But that's not the basis of having a right relationship with God
 - It's only by his love and grace

- So by including the elder brother in the parable ...
 - Jesus is exposing the self-righteous and prideful hearts of the Pharisees and TOL; and
 - Showing them that their attitude to the sinners and tax collectors meant, that like the older brother ... they were just as lost and alienated from God as the wayward sinner

- And Jesus is saying to these guys ... don't be like the elder brother
 - Don't stand outside the heavenly feast and refuse to come in
 - Don't refuse the pleading of your father in heaven to come to him
 - Don't continue to alienate yourself from the father because of your self-righteousness

- **Application**
- This is such a good parable for us on so many levels
- Because you can hear this parable about the younger son and be like one of the Pharisees and think to yourself
 - This doesn't apply to me
 - I'm not a wayward sinner that Jesus is talking about
 - I haven't gone off the rails
 - I'm pretty good
 - I'm pretty moral
 - I'm pretty upright

- But in the elder brother ... Jesus is challenging the person who thinks they're a good person ... and thinks their okay with God ...
 - but in reality they're just like the elder brother and a million miles away from God

- Elder brothers come in two forms – you can be a
 - Church-goer and be an elder brother; or
 - Never stepped foot in a church in your life and be an elder brother

- Church-goer elder brothers are like the Pharisees and TOL because they go through the motions of religious ritual ... but they have no real heart for God and his mission to seek and save the lost
 - God loves to see sinners saved ... elder brothers aren't concerned with that
 - Don't want to forgo the comfortable lifestyle they have on the farm to seek lost brothers
 - They're focus is on their own desires and priorities rather than those of their heavenly father
 - They like to stay within their religious circle of friends rather than seek out and welcome the wayward newcomer
 - They focus on doing the right thing and saying the right thing – but their hearts affection is ultimately for themselves and not for God

- This person acts all religious ... might be a regular church goer, go to growth group, help out around church ... but they have no real love for God and his mission

- The other version of the elder brother is the person who doesn't go to church
 - But this person thinks of themselves as a pretty good person
 - Like the elder brother in the parable they think ...
 - I'm ...
 - Conscientious
 - Loyal
 - Reliable
 - Honest
 - Morally upright
 - And because they live a pretty good life ...
 - Because they're not as wayward as younger brothers ...
 - they think God ought to accept them
 - Just like the elder brother thought he was owed the inheritance for being a good son

- Jesus is saying to both the religious church-goer ... and the morally good person
 - If that's you ... then you've got elder brother syndrome
 - And you are just as lost from your Father in heaven as wayward sinners like the younger brother

5. The Gracious Loving Father [SLIDE]

- How can you be found by the father and enjoy his heavenly feast?
 - Need three things

- **Grace of God**
- The first thing we need is the love and grace of God
- Notice how loving and gracious the father is to both his sons in order to bring them back
- He doesn't wait for the younger son on the verandah of his home, impatiently tapping his foot murmuring
 - *"Here comes that son of mine, after all he's done he'd better have something good to say for himself!"*
 - No! He shows amazing grace
 - He runs to and kisses his son and welcomes him

- Even though he didn't deserve it ... He restores him, he loves him and celebrates at his return
- And the Father shows the **SAME** love and grace to the elder brother too
 - Doesn't say - "*Well if that's the way he's wants to be ... then he can sit out there and mope*"
- No! The father shows grace and goes out to the older brother and **pleads** with him to come into the feast
- What this shows us whether you're an elder brother or a younger brother ... we all need God's amazing grace and love
- But for both ... it's God who graciously puts aside our failings and lovingly comes to us
 - We will never find God unless he shows us grace and comes to us first
- **Repentance**
- The second thing we need is a humility before God
- The key difference between the brothers is their attitude to the father
- Even though the younger son abused his father and ran off to spend all his money
 - He came to his senses
 - He realised he'd been wrong
 - He realised he'd sinned against him
 - And he left his rebellious life and came back home to the Father in humility and repentance
 - He sought the Father's forgiveness
- And as we saw, the father was waiting and willing to grant him that forgiveness
- The older brother, however was blind to his true condition
 - He mistook his obedience and loyalty to being right with the father
 - But in reality his obedience and loyalty was not because he loved the father ... but because it would get him his inheritance
 - If he truly loved the father he would've rejoiced with his father at his brother's return
 - And so when his father pleads with him to come and celebrate with him ... the elder brother refuses because of his self-righteousness and pride
- The story of the older son shows us that God doesn't want piety, religion or self-righteousness
- God doesn't want your morality ... he wants your humility

- This is the reason one son entered the feast and the other did not
 - It was a willingness to come back to his father in humility and repentance
- **Application**
- What this shows us ... to be right with your heavenly Father ...
 - Whether you're a younger brother or an elder brother ... it's about being
 - Recognising the sin of your past
 - Turning back to God in humility
 - Accepting his invitation to join him at his heavenly feast

6. True Elder Brother

- The third thing we need is someone to come and rescue us

[SLIDE]

- **Illustration - Lost Brother**

- True story of a young man (Lt. Daniel Dawson) who was a US soldier missing in action during the Vietnam War
 - When the family could get no word of him through any official channel, the older brother (Donald) flew to Vietnam and risking his life, searched the jungles and battlefields for his brother
 - Pictures of the plane and his brother that he handed out to Vietnamese
 - He was in real danger > an American walking through the jungle amongst the Viet Cong
 - But despite the danger, he was never hurt, because those on both sides had heard of his dedication and respected his quest
 - Some of them called him 'the brother'
 - He never found him ... but he went looking for his younger brother
- This is what the elder brother should have done
 - This is what a true elder brother should have done
 - He would have said
 - *"Father, my younger brother has been a fool and now his life is in ruins. But I'll go look for him and bring him home"*
- But for the elder brother to do that it would cost him personally
 - If he found his brother and brought his brother home it would mean having to share in his own portion of the estate

[SLIDE]

- But Jesus doesn't put a true elder brother in the story - one who is willing to go and find his wayward brother and bring him back
 - In the parable the younger brother gets a Pharisee for a brother

- But we don't
 - In Jesus we have a true elder brother
 - Speaking of himself Jesus said
 - *"The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost"* (19:10)
- As our true elder brother ...
 - Jesus is one who doesn't just go to the next country to find us, but is one who comes all the way from heaven to earth
 - Jesus pays not just with a finite cost in an earthly estate ... but with the infinite cost of his own life
- For the younger brother to return to the family, the elder brother had to bear the cost himself
 - Our true elder brother, Jesus paid our debt on the cross in our place
 - There Jesus was stripped naked of his robe and dignity ... so that we could be clothed with the Father's robe of dignity we don't deserve
 - On the cross our true elder brother was willing to be associated with us wayward brothers ... so that we could be brought back into God's family
 - There Jesus drank the cup of eternal justice so that we might enter the eternal feast in heaven and share in the cup of the father's joy
- How do we go from being lost to found?
- We need
 - the grace of God to forgive us
 - an attitude of humility and repentance
 - our elder brother Jesus to rescue us

7. Conclusion

- If you're a Christian then this is how you went from being lost in your sin ... to being found by your heavenly father and invited to his heavenly feast
 - It's all by his amazing grace
 - It's because our true elder brother came to rescue us
- If you're a Christian and you're
 - feeling spiritually dry
 - not excited for the gospel
 - losing your zeal to reach and save the lost
- Then ponder afresh what Jesus teaches us in this parable
- About
 - The amazing grace and love of the father who unconditionally forgives and welcomes you in to his heavenly feast

- The extraordinary price that our true elder brother Jesus paid in order to bring you home to the Father
- You may be here today and see that you're like one of the brothers in this parable
 - You may be like the younger brother
 - The wayward one ... running away from the Father
 - You may be more like the elder brother
 - The moral one ... doing good to get what you want from the Father
- Both types are lost
 - Both are alienated from the father
 - Both desperately need rescuing
 - Both need the amazing grace and love of God
 - Both need Jesus to pay the cost
- The question is
 - Will you refuse the pleadings of your father in heaven to come to him and so remain outside the heavenly feast
 - Or will you turn back to the father and
 - accept his grace and forgiveness ... and
 - share in the eternal inheritance that come from once more being called his son?

PRAY