

About 20 months ago, before I decided to spend a decade on the book of Luke, I actually preached exegetically through this. We just took each word at a time and broke it down. So I won't be going to that level today. But what I wanted to do with you this morning on this text is try to correct what I perceive to be an error here. And so we're going to look at this at a little different angle and I hope correct what might be a little off here. Now you've come in with what a sociologist would call a world-view, which means at the very core of your heart, you have a set of core beliefs that you see the world through. And so let me mark probably three of the most popular world-views. There is the religious world-view that there is a god, whoever he or she is, that must be appeased through a series of actions. So there are things that we do and do not do in order to curry favor with that god and to somehow get eternal life when we die. So that's the religious world-view. And then there's a spiritual world-view, which is different from a religious world-view. I know people who are very spiritual and not very religious, and I know very religious people who are not spiritual. The spiritual world-view says there's probably not a god, but there are forces driving things. Maybe that force is karma, maybe the universe itself is driving, but we need to tap into those spiritual realities and be aware of them to milk out of life all that we want. And then there is the secular world-view that says there is no god, there are no forces, there is no energy; there is simply us and what we make of it. And those are your three predominant world-views. There are definitely more than that, but those are the three predominant ones, particularly in the West. Now, every time Jesus preaches and teaches, He is deconstructing one world-view and reconstructing another. What Jesus is doing every time that He teaches is taking a world-view and dismantling it as incorrect, and then He's reconstructing the world-view that is how He designed the universe to function. Now I want to show you that, and then near the end, I just want to rant a little bit.

Let's go. You cannot understand Luke 15 without understanding verse 1. If you miss verse 1, you have missed and will more than likely proof-text the rest of this chapter. The whole key to this chapter hinges on who is in the crowd to hear these three parables. So let's look at it. "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him." Most of us have had the weight of what a tax collector is removed from us, because we have learned in Sunday school that Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he, and so he climbed up in a Sycamore tree because the Lord he wanted to see. And we were told that a tax collector was a man who was supposed to get \$25 from you but instead he takes \$30 from you because he wanted to get rich. Now that's a good story, but it isn't true. Let me try to explain why Zacchaeus really was a worthless piece of trash who on his best day deserved to be burned alive. At this point in history, the world is ruled by Rome. From India to England, Rome ruled the world. And it was not the dainty sweetness that you saw in the movie *Gladiator*. They were a ruthless, horrific government. In fact, there are historical accounts of Rome conquering a city and then taking 20,000 men, women and children, stripping them naked and crucifying them on the road leading up to that city for up to 40 miles. So that going into the city for supplies, going into the city to see family, going into the city to get work done, you would have to pass by 20,000 suffering, dying or dead men, women and children who have been stripped of their clothes as an act of shame just to burn in your heart, "Don't mess with Rome." They were a brutal regime. Now if you rule from India to England and you don't have an air force or you don't have the ability to press a button and launch weapons, the only way you can govern a landmass that size is with a massive army. Now Rome did not have enough men for the size of army they needed. So as they conquered a land, they would take transcripts. They would hire mercenaries and they would give them food, weapons and training, and they became part of the legions of Rome, despite the fact that they were not Romans. Now, here's what we've got to get to the bottom of. How do you fund, supply, feed and train a massive army? Taxes. Zacchaeus was an Israelite who purchased the right from Rome to raise funds for an oppressive occupying army that was responsible for the brutal death of hundreds of

thousands of people. I know of no cultural equivalent. There is no cultural equivalent to the wickedness that was a tax collector in Jerusalem, none. It would be like you living next door to a man who had single-handedly funded the murder of your loved ones and it be legal. But here's the thing. Tax collectors are drawing near to hear Him.

They're not the only ones. Sinners are there too. And for us to understand "sinners," we have to get out of the Western mindset. Because here in the West, you're a sinner, I'm a sinner, everyone's a sinner. That's not the case here. Here "sinner" is marked as a class of people that are deformed, diseased or whose job is one that the Jews would have considered irreparable. So they were prostitutes, strippers, slave traders, tax collectors or they had some kind of physical ailment that the Jews viewed as a curse being from God. Do you remember the story where the Pharisees dragged the blind man to Jesus and asked, "Was it his parent's sin or his?" And Jesus said, "Neither, so that God might be glorified," and He heals him. But the Jews see that he's blind, so God has to hate him. Or there's the woman who bled or lepers, any one of these diseases would have been marked as unclean and would have been viewed by the culture at large as some sort of judgment from God.

The tax collectors and the sinners though are drawing near to hear Him. So let me just chat with you for a minute about the world-view of the tax collector and sinner. The tax collector and sinner would have been taught from the day they gasped their first gift of air that they were outcasts. They were taught that God had judged them, there was no forgiveness of them and they would have a meeting with God one day and it was not going to be pleasant. They're not allowed in the synagogue, they're not allowed to make sacrifices, they're not allowed to hear the Torah read. They are absolutely exercised from the religious life of Israel. And yet here they are gathering near to hear Jesus. I don't know what your story is, but in my own story there was a point in my life early on where I was sinning at such a varsity level that I began to embrace this world-view of "Well, I'm not that type of person that God goes after, so I might as well just head-long into sin." That's how I was. "Well, I've already blown this, I've already blown that, I've already done that, I can't do that." So I began to say, "Okay, God's for that type of person, and I'm not that type of person. I'll run from Him rather than to Him." That was my world-view, and that's this world-view. Jesus will get to it more in a second.

Now the tax collectors and sinners aren't the only ones at this party. Look at verse 2. "And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

They're the other end of the spectrum. So you've got your tax collectors and sinners and you've got your Pharisees and scribes. They're kind of the varsity Evangelicals. They have like nine fish on the back of their chariots. They only listen to Hebrew music. They are upright. They live in such a way that is so morally upright that they believe that their moral uprightness has carried favor with God that God will not extend to others. So they expect this certain amount of interaction with God that others are not going to get because they've done things well. And there's your two world-views present in the crowd.

So Jesus begins to do what He does, deconstruct/reconstruct. Let's look at it. Verse 3, "So he told them this parable: 'What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'"

Look at the deconstruction on both sides that's going on. "Which one of you, if you had a lost sheep, wouldn't leave the ninety-nine and pursue the one? Now look at the world-views. If you're over here and you think that there's no way God could love you even if you came to Him, there's no way He could forgive you, that you were outside His will, that you were going to have a meeting with Him, but that was going to be a meeting of judgment, now He's deconstructing that and going, "No, no, no. You're not coming to me. I'm coming to get you. You're really kind of an ignorant sheep that got lost, and so I'm coming to get you. I would not leave it up to you to come back to Me. I'm coming to get you. And when I find you, it's not going to be, 'You little dumb sheep.' I am going to throw you on My back, and I am going to rejoice. And when I get home with the other ninety-nine, I'm calling everyone over to celebrate with

me. So He deconstructed the "Oh, I've gone astray, He can't love me," and He deconstructed the idea that the ninety-nine are good by themselves, forget about the one. He just dismantled it. And now He reconstructs. "Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." This side thinks that heaven rejoices over God's just judgment on their lives, which is why they aren't coming to God. And He goes, "No, no, no. There's more celebration in your coming home than you being judged." And this side over here believes there's more celebration over their goodness than the repentance of those who are wicked, and they just found out that's not true either. Do you see the reconstruction? So He tore down both belief systems and rebuilt another one.

And it's like a Quentin Tarantino film, it just goes right into the next story. There's no transition. Let's look. "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'" A silver coin is a day's wage. She has ten day's wages. She's not hurting. This is not 2008 where you have a bank account and a check card and you get paid every two weeks. She has ten days of wages saved up. She's a pretty wealthy woman for this time period. She loses one day's wage, but that's not that big of a deal. She has nine day's wages left. Most people live day to day. She has nine day's wages. It is not that big of a deal that she lost a coin. It's definitely not that big of a deal that you need to rip your house apart trying to find it. But she does. Deconstruction. So the tax collector and sinner feel useless. "I mean, I'm just a silver coin. Look at the nine coins. Can you imagine what you can get for nine silver coins? You can't get much with one. With nine silver coins, you can buy all sorts of things. But one silver coin, that's like the change in your couch and you can't get a lot with it." And Jesus goes, "I'll tear the house to pieces looking for the change in the couch, even though I have nine coins." See the deconstruction? And the deconstruction over here is, "We've got nine coins, who needs one more? We can buy anything we want. We don't need the change in the couch." And Jesus is going, "Oh, we need the change in the couch." He's blowing them both up. Now here's the reconstruction. "Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Once again, "I want all of My children, all of them. And then there's joy in heaven."

Now the third story's the big one, so let's go. It's probably the most well known. Verse 11, "And he said, 'There was a man who had two sons. 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. 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.'" Can I tell you a little truth about Christianity that people probably keep too quiet? When you surrender your life to Christ, He begins to really go after your heart, and that makes some things difficult. Like I felt like I got duped into Christianity. They were like, "Do you want joy? Do you want happiness? Come on down!" I was like, "Who doesn't want that?" And then I went down and it wasn't too long after that before God says, "This area of your heart, I want it." But I didn't want to give it. Let me say it this way. If you have a historic struggle with something that just doesn't go away easily, lust, anger, bitterness, there is going to be this temptation as you begin to follow Him that maybe it would be easier if you ran back to those things. Refusing sonship, saying, "No thank You. Give me what's mine and let me go," always leads to slavery to that thing. Let me show you how it works itself out. Verse 14, "And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything." Keep in mind that these are Jews, and this man's eating with the pigs, the unclean animal. Verse 17, "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.''" Now, both sides at this point have to be going, "Here we go." Because if you are a tax collector and a sinner, you see that the son is going to go back to the father now and will have to be a slave to the father in order to get back. So they're going, "Ah, there's the hook." Now this side's going, "Ah, there's the

hook, because they're going to come back to God and God's really going to put it on them." Let's keep reading, because both are so wrong. Verse 20, "And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 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.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate." So there was this idea of, "We're going to get back and we're going to have to do all these things in order for God to love us, for God to justify us, for God to walk with us." And the son in the story shows up and says, "I'll be your servant." But what does the father say? "Bull, get me a ring. You're my son, not my servant." This is what happens in Acts 17 when God says to the apostle Paul, "God is not served by human hands as though He needed anything." You can't curry God's favor by serving Him. He doesn't need anything. The things He's asking of you are for you, not for Him. Come on, are we really going to worship a God who's like, "Oh, I would love to do that, but I can't unless this moron who couldn't pass the 8th grade helps Me out." Is that the God we're worshiping here? How weak a God, how impotent a God if He's going, "Oh, there's all these things I'd like to do, but this guy, he's just not doing them." That's silly, but it's what everybody thinks. "Oh, I'll do these things for You." And He's like, "No, no, no. You're My son, purchased by the cross of Jesus Christ."

Let's keep going, "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing." Just for the record, you're blowing the place up if you can hear dancing from a mile away. I'm just saying. I've been to some parties. This thing's epic. "And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 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.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him..." His father begged him, pleaded with him, "Come in. Don't do this." Okay, let's chat. I, by God's grace, came to a saving knowledge of Jesus right before I went off to college. And because of that, I went to a small Baptist college in west Texas. I got out there and had an unbelievable amount of zeal for the Lord. From what my home was, what I was coming from, the fact that He could love me, all that stuff was just transforming to me. I got there and I ran into something very, very different from the faith that I was experiencing. I don't know what to call it except Evangelicalism. Let me give you some examples. Lee Lewis, who is the Pastor of Care here at the Village, he's a college buddy of mine also. We took a lot of ministry classes together. We were both Bible majors. We were in this class, it was something like, "The Theology of Marriage, Family & Sexuality." And in it there was a discussion with Lee, myself and eight other guys. And there was a thing that came up where those guys began to argue that they were virgins and therefore they weren't going to marry anyone who wasn't a virgin, because they had kept themselves pure and there was no way there were going to marry anyone who hadn't done the same. The future ministers of God's grace completely ignorant of God's grace. So I remember sitting there going, "Okay, I'm confused." Because there was this day that we were like, "You would save a sinner like me?" And now we've moved to, "I deserve more than that."

Then I had to take a drama class; it was very painful for me. I'm creative, but I'm linear. And so "Be a tree" was just kind of weird for me, alright. But I had to take this drama class. My love language is sarcasm. And in that class was this girl named Kimberly who that gift was powerful with her. So I got to know her, and we just mocked the rest of the class the bulk of the time. She was 26, no church background, no relationship with Christ, she just lived in the area. At 26 she had already had a child, wasn't married. So we would just laugh, and I would talk to her about my faith and really the difference between what the Bible said and what she was experiencing from a small Baptist campus. And a friend of mine named Robbie Seay was doing a concert in San Angelo, so I said, "Hey, hop in with my crew and check this thing out." And so she hopped in the car and we got there. As soon as I got there, I was like, "Oh no." It was a "True Love Waits" rally. Now I'm all about true love waiting, but I was just like, "This is probably the wrong venue to invite Kim to." I've tried to work through this, but I still get very angry thinking about it. The guy starts his talk. Of course we didn't use much of

the Bible. Much of Evangelicalism just prooftexts. He takes this rose up and smells it and talks about how everybody loves the fragrance of the rose and how pretty it is. He throws his rose out into the crowd, and they're passing it around and smelling it. While they're doing that he's going on about, "Venereal diseases are bad and they itch and you'll need penicillin." It's fear-mongering really. As if you can scare kids into purity. Talk about the beauty of God's design, not the dangers of venereal diseases. About 20 minutes into his talk, he's like, "Where's my rose?" And so this kid brings it up and the stem's broken, the leaves are all jacked up, there's like one petal left on it. He was like, "Who would want this? Who would want this rose? Would anyone want to put this and display this as yours?" And I just remember feeling, "I've got to physically harm him. I have got to rush the stage and choke him out, grab his microphone and correct this. This is wrong." That's what I felt welling up inside of me. The correct answer is, "Jesus does, you dummy." So I've got to get back in the car and go, "Kim, that guy's an idiot. I know he uses the Bible, but you should not listen to what he says. He does not understand the gospel. He's actually preaching what Jesus came to destroy."

And then there are all these silly things over and over and over again. For those of you who grew up in church, do you remember that youth camp experience where by Thursday night they had us burning our secular CD's? For the record, I am still in favor of burning country music. I am still for that. I believe that it could be biblical. Neither here nor there. Let's get back to the point. And you always had this hyper-spiritual kid who came back and was like, "I burned my Metallica album and it hissed. I think a demon came out of it when I burned it." And I was always just like, "No, dummy. It's plastic. You're burning plastic. That's what happens when you burn plastic." And then if we're all honest, we went back six months later and bought the Black album again anyway. And on and on I could go where it had moved from "... saved a wretch like me," to "this is what we deserve and let's stay away from those people." And so I can promise you, if it wasn't for David McQueen and Ray Templeton at Beltway Park Baptist Church, I'd be practicing law right now. Because I was going, "Uh uh, if this is the game. I'm not playing."

So what I'm trying to do up here week in and week out is deconstruct that stuff that's everywhere. I'm trying to deconstruct it and then reconstruct over here. Now here's where I think we have to be careful. If all you do is switch the characters in the story, we're no better off. If you show grace and mercy to the tax collector and sinner but you show no grace and mercy to the older brother, you're in the same world-view. You're in the same world-view that Jesus deconstructed, that He destroyed. If the hardest, darkest of life get all grace and mercy and love but the religious bigot gets none, then we're still operating in the same place. So let me try to right this ship here. There are going to be times that I stand up here and call certain men liars. It's not arrogance, they're liars. Like if some guy rises to prominence and tells you that God wants everybody to be healthy and wealthy and if you just had enough faith that would happen, I'll call him a liar. Because he is lying. The only ones getting rich off that message are the ones saying it. If a guy rises to prominence in Evangelical circles and he says that God's not angry at all and so the cross doesn't really need to be about penal substitutionary atonement, that doesn't need to happen because God was never angry to begin with, I'm going to stand up here and call him a liar because he is. That's not arrogant, that's my job as the shepherd, to point out what is false so that life might be found in what is true. But at the same time here, knowing that most of us have had an experience in church that has left us a little frustrated and maybe even a little bitter...which is why I love the Village. I know because I get e-mails from you all the time saying, "Get 'em, Chandler." We've got this experience, we've got this thing that we saw, this thing that we hated. You've got to be very, very careful here that you don't take what I mean for deconstruction as fodder to burn in your bitterness. If you do, we're in the same world-view that Jesus meant to dismantle.

Let me give you some examples. We're not going to build the monster here. We're 6,000 people across nine services. We respond to that by buying an Albertson's that we're going to build out. And then from there we'll probably go more video venue, smaller places vs. one giant place. I am adamantly, philosophically opposed to spending \$60-90 million on a facility. That's because the elders of this church and I fasted and prayed and sought His face and we felt like our

role in this community is to go about it that way. I'm not saying by any stretch of the imagination that people who do that are sinning or wicked. That's not what I'm saying. So if you hear it that way, you're hearing wrong. Because maybe somebody decided to build a \$1 billion facility where when you sat down on your reclining chair, it read your brainwaves and shot whatever espresso mocha drink you drink up into a glass sitting next to you and a straw came out of the back and went into your mouth while a Bible opened up in front of you, even if someone did that, I don't have to stand in front of God and give an account for that. My hope is that they have prayed, they have sought the face of God and that they are playing their role in this community. We're not going to try to reach youth by building double-decker basketball courts with a rock wall on the side of them. But I'm not saying those who are trying to do that are wrong or sinful. I'm saying we've heard from the Lord and we're going to be obedient to it. You're hearing me wrong if you think I'm attacking someone. When we do giving campaigns here, there will be no thermometer on the stage. We're just not doing it. We're not pulling an obscure Old Testament passage out as our theme for raising money. Nor are we making promises that are untrue. And for those of you who listen to us via podcast, just because your pastor has decided to do that doesn't mean that he's wrong. In fact, you have to quit being so divisive and support the man God put above you. I'm not saying owning Christian t-shirts with really corny slogans are wrong. I am saying that they're goofy and I don't know anyone who got saved by those t-shirts. "I was just searching. What do I do, Lord? Wait, 'A Bread Crumb and Fish.' Tell me what you know." And so you've got to be careful here in the end, because in the parable the father didn't go, "Oh, the older brother drives me crazy what a whiny little...just sit outside and pout while we party." That's not what he does. He goes out and entertains him. "Come in."

So I sense that there's this kind of swagger that happens here, this kind of "We do it right." No, our way is our way. It's not *the* way. If you say it's *the* way, you've made the same mistake you accuse others of making. And it happens all the time. The one that's most famous was after the Christmas Eve service three years ago. I wore slacks. We dug through the closet and found them. They were in a little ball. We pulled them out and got them pressed. I wore slacks and I tucked in my nice button-up shirt. And I thought I was looking good. I walked up on stage and we did our Christmas Eve service. And it was Christmas Day and an e-mail was pushed to my phone from a girl who called me a sell out because she grew up in a church where you had to wear the suit, you had to wear the tie and she loved the Village because there was so much freedom in how you could express yourself in how you dress. Now do you see what she's done? She's doing the same thing; she's just the one who gets to control the uniform now. So instead of back in the old days when it was "if you didn't wear suits, you didn't wear your best before the Lord", now it's "suits and wearing dress up clothes was some sort of indication of the dryness of your spirit, but because you wore blue jeans and t-shirt, you must really love the Lord." That's just as ignorant and dumb as what her parents believed that pushed her to what she's believing. It's the same thing, just packaged a little differently. I guess I'm saying you've got to be gracious to the grace killers. If you haven't, you are them. Now the line's thin, because there's got to be times where you go, "That's a lie." But matters of doctrine are very, very different than matters of philosophy. Be careful that you don't let deconstruction become fuel for your bitterness.

Let's finish this out. Verse 28, "But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 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. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" The problem with hyper fundamentalism is it viewed itself as superior to everyone else and they said, "It's us, and it's them." What you've got to be careful of here at the Village is that we don't become a missional community that says, "There's us that gets missional grace and outreach, and then there's the hyper fundamentalist." That's the same thing. The father's response was, "The fatted calf was already yours. That's our party in there, not your brother's party. It's our party. Come, drink some wine, eat some steak, listen to the band. Come in." May God bless us and keep us. May

He fill our hearts with grace and compassion. For the same devil that wars and destroys the tax collectors and sinners is warring and destroying our older brother.

Do you find yourself in the crowd in Luke 15? If you're in the crowd, do you happen to be in this place this morning and have you bought into a world-view that says you've gone too far? Like you've got this thing that you've done, you've got this thing that you're doing, you've got this thing that you can't shake. And so what you've told yourself is that you're just going to go headlong into your junk, because there's no way this can be for you, that there's a type of person that God comes after and you're not that type of person. You are embracing and living out a lie meant to rob you of the grace that was purchased for you on the cross. Or maybe that's not you. I know we're in Dallas. Maybe you're on the other side, and what you've done is worked and went to great lengths to build a giant wall around you and your family where people like you are allowed in, but nobody who struggles is allowed in. Maybe you've created this little world where it's us vs. them. I think there are some of each here this morning. I think the bulk of us fall somewhere in the middle where we're men and women who still struggle with sin and also at times struggle with self-righteousness. And regardless of where you land on this thing, all of it needs to be repented of. I just can't tell you how arrogant of a position it is to think that God can't forgive you. Who are you to say that He can't? Who lets you make the decision that you've gone too far for His grace and mercy? Especially when the very people who killed Him, He prayed, "Father, forgive them." Men who had raised money to murder hundreds of thousands of their own countrymen are invited to dinner with Him. Who are you? What an arrogant, arrogant position to take. And really I would even take you being here this morning, with this message at this time, a type of objective evidence that He's running you down. And then how horribly arrogant is it to believe that the grace and mercy shown to you is only for you? I don't know how to communicate to you enough that all your righteous acts are filthy rags to Him. I didn't make that up. It's in the Bible you so hold fast to. It's not *their* deeds are filthy rags, *your* righteous deeds are filthy rags, yours. You have fallen short. If righteousness could be obtained through the law, Christ died for nothing, is what the text says. And so they both just need to be repented of. They both need to be laid down. Or maybe you just have some bitterness in your heart at a church you just came from. Maybe you saw that the things they did were foolish. And I'm not saying they weren't foolish. Maybe they really were foolish. Maybe they really were hurtful. Maybe they really were sinful. But if you let that root grow into your heart until it becomes bitterness, the book of Hebrews is very clear that not only will it destroy you but it will destroy those around you. You've got to let it go. You've got to turn them over to the Lord. May God make this a place of grace and not just to the tax collector and the sinner, but to the older brother also. There will be in the Bible Belt a lot more older brothers than tax collectors and sinners. They are by far the largest mission field.

Let's pray, "Father, my hope is that You would just let this text read us today. I know I pray that all the time, but I don't want us to read the Bible, I want it to read us. I pray that we might let this text penetrate and dig deep into the real deep parts of our heart and soul so we would know what's in there for Your glory and our joy. And so for the tax collector and sinner, I pray that You would find the lost coin and that You would find the sheep and that You would throw it on Your shoulders and that we could all rejoice. And for the older brother, I pray that You would entreat and plead with him to come in and that he would. And help those who are in between. It's for Your beautiful name. Amen."