

Luke 15:11-32

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[0 : 00] I want to desire to do so. I'm going to ask you if you'll join with me as we stand together and we read the Word of God in Luke 15. We'll start in verse 11 and go to the end of the chapter which gets us to verse 32. It says, And he said, that is Jesus, and he said, A man had two sons.

The younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me. So he divided his wealth between them, and not many days later the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into the fields to feed swine.

And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger. I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired men.

So he got up and came to his father, but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his slaves, Quickly, bring out the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet, and bring the fatted calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and has come to life again.

[1 : 31] He was lost and has been found, and they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard the music and dancing, and he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be.

And he said to him, Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has received him back safe and sound. But he became angry and was not willing to go in, and his father came out and began pleading with him.

But he answered and said to his father, Look, for so many years I have been serving you, and I have never neglected a command of yours, and yet you have never given me a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth for prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him. And he said to him, Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.

But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live and was lost and has been found. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you so much for this day.

[2 : 29] Lord, we rejoice in your word. And Lord, we pray as we have read it and seen it, Lord, now that you would speak to our hearts. Lord, may we not filter it through our own interpretation, but Lord, may we rely wholly upon the Spirit to interpret it for us.

Lord, by the power and presence of your Spirit, would you reveal the truth to us so that we would have lives that are changed for your glory and honor. We ask it all in Jesus Christ's holy and precious name. Amen. You may be seated.

Many Bible scholars are in agreement that this parable really is not about the prodigal son. I know that you've probably heard that before, and I know that some of you, that may be new territory, but that this parable, while it has the prodigal son as a player in it, is really not about the prodigal son.

We know that this is not an actual event because no names are given. Therefore, it is a parable, and parables are what would be a commonly understood thing, a commonly understood truth used to reveal a heavenly aspect.

Jesus is not recounting something that happened actually, but he is recounting something with a kind of opening up a window into heaven to show us the divine interpretation here, or to show us what he is trying to answer to the Pharisees and the scribes, that is, their grumbling and complaining.

[3 : 39] And the reason that we can ascertain that this is not necessarily all about the prodigal is because every parable that Christ tells has its emphasis at the end.

Really, the main point is given last. Everything else is just a player in that parable. If you take the parable of the soils, for instance, the very last soil is the soil that bore fruit. Now, we know that that is the emphasis that the true soil, or the good soil, or the heart that has been rightly prepared and has rightly received the word of God, will bear fruit.

That is the emphasis of that parable. Because Jesus says later that if you abide in me and I abide in you, you will bear much fruit. So what Jesus was showing us here is not necessarily about how much seed is planted, but about how much fruit is produced, right?

That is the testimony of a well-prepared heart, or a life that is lived rightly and properly before the kingdom. And here in the parable of the prodigal son, the very last thing that is mentioned is the other son, the second son.

And that is the one that Jesus really is addressing. But we cannot overlook the prodigal and only solely look on the older brother. We must look at both of them because he includes both of them.

[4 : 51] So this morning, I want you to see a tale of two sinners. A tale of two sinners in the parable of the prodigal son. Because in all actuality, what we see here is two people with the same problem behaving in different ways.

It is a tale of two sinners. It is not a tale of a sinner and a righteous one. It is not a tale of a good kid and a bad kid. This is really a tale of two sinners and how they respond and how they behave in relation to the father.

Number one, we see the riches that they enjoy. The riches that they enjoy. We are very familiar with the fact of the prodigal, but we must not ever overlook the first statement.

It says, and he said, a man had two sons. So now all of a sudden, we know that this parable is not just about the one son who went off, but it is about both sons because we are introduced to them at the very beginning.

A man had two sons. And the younger one, the one we like to pick on, or the one that we are worried about sometimes, or maybe even the one that we have played the part of, and if we were to be honest, all of us have played the part of, the younger son from time to time.

[5 : 55] The younger son is the one that really moves the story along. He is the one that pushes the issue, if you will, because if everybody stays home and everybody stays happy, we never see the problem, right? If everybody just kind of covers over it or just kind of sweeps things under the rug and we cover it up and make it look pretty, everything is okay.

But it's only when someone acts out that we really see the problem. And we have to be thankful for the younger son because he acted out and he revealed the problem. Some of you are saying, well, I don't like it when my kids act out, but they always reveal a problem, right?

Either a problem in them or a problem in us. And we need to understand that. Sometimes it is a conflict that we have here. But what we see is the younger son, he gets kind of audacious and he says to his father, Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.

Now, essentially what he is saying in the times of Christ is, Dad, I wish you were dead. I want your money. That's exactly what he was saying because the father's estate would never be divided until he died. So if those of us who parent sons, and we understand that there's always some conflict, right?

We can be thankful in some aspects, but this younger son says, Daddy, I'd rather have your money than you. So give me the share of the estate that falls to me. Now, let us not look over, because I think in our haste in reading Scripture that we do look over, let us not look over this next phrase.

[7 : 07] It says, so he divided his wealth between them. We're looking at the riches that they both enjoy. Now, what did he do with his wealth? He didn't just give the younger son which fell to him.

He gave the younger son and the older son the lot which fell to them. Really, the father emptied himself of all of his possessions because it says in Scripture that he divided his wealth between them.

Now, in Scripture and in the time of Christ, firstborn has a great privilege. Now, I'm not trying to tout all you firstborn children.

I'm a secondborn, so I'll kind of keep us level, right? But in Scripture, firstborn, especially firstborn sons, had a divine privilege or had a special right in the household. In my own household, we tried to do this, and I know it may seem a little outdated.

It may seem a little archaic in practice, but whoever is the oldest of the children that are present at the house at that time usually sits on the right hand of me. My wife always sits on my left hand. I sit at the head of the table, and you can say, Oh, man, this man's so outdated.

[8 : 09] I bet he's one of those who teaches some crazy Scripture, but I'm just trying to be biblical because the table means something, right? At our table, I sit at the head of the table. Some of you can get offended by it or not, but it works real well in my household, right?

And when I sit at the head of our table, the oldest of our children that are present typically sit on my right hand because in Scripture, the son's at the right hand of the father, right?

So that's a little weird. And as the oldest one leaves and the next one comes around, we just move around the table. We're braiding all the time. I'm like, I'm going to sit right there. And I'm like, No, that's not your seat yet, buddy. We've got a long time before we get there, right?

It means something. It does. And it should always symbolize something. Listen, friends, I want to just tell you, I don't want a complete side note here, but the table in your home means something. When you have people gathered around it or when you don't have people gathered around it, when your family's gathered with you, it means something.

And we need to let it be that there's a reason why so much is given to table fellowship in Scripture. There's a reason why I encourage you to come to the church fellowship meals, and I encourage you to come to the Thanksgiving meals. And there's also a reason, and I'm trying to figure out a way where I can put us all around one big table at the fellowship meal.

[9 : 14] I haven't figured it out yet, but if I can get those round tables all welded together where we all have to look at one another, I'm probably going to do it. Because I want to put us together around one table, that way the table fellowship means something.

It is important. Because what we see here, okay, and I say all this, because he divided the share that fell to them. Before we look so favorably upon the older son, let us understand that the older son, this doesn't happen in my household, by the way, okay, the older son was entitled to twice as much as the second son.

That's just the way it is. The firstborn son always received more. So, in this case, the firstborn son was given a third of his riches, and the older son was given two-thirds of his riches.

So, who has more? It is the older son, right? And it is hot in here. I'm sweating like crazy, so if y'all see beads of sweat going across my forehead, I'm sorry. This is one of those dates, okay?

So what we see here is that the father divided his riches to them. I want you to understand this before we get any further. Both of them were enriched by the crazy request of the younger son.

[10 : 27] Both of them were given more. Don't feel sorry for the older son who was left behind because he was left behind with twice as much money living in a house he did not pay for as his younger brother who took the money and ran.

Right? Both of them were enriched. We see the riches they enjoy. Friend, I just want to tell you something because this is a worldly example of a heavenly reality. What we see is in the father's presence, all people, all mankind, are enriched with the gifts of the father.

Jesus says that the sun shines on the righteous and the unrighteous. The Bible tells us in the book of Job that if God was to call his spirit back to himself, all man would die. You do not have to acknowledge the reality of God.

You don't have to acknowledge the reality of Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior to enjoy the sunshine and the rain and the air and the breeze and everything in creation. I was watching the show yesterday and a scientist was talking about how he was doing this experiment and he was sending this balloon up into the heavens and he was hoping that when he got to the stratosphere of the heavens, he could collect life particles so that he could prove, and I blew my mind and I love science, right?

So that he could prove that there was a time when these organic material of life in outer space reached the earth's ozone and the cooling atmosphere of the earth created life as we know it.

[11 : 41] My question is, well, who put the life in the heavens? Right? If there's life up there that didn't originate in earth and it had to come from somewhere because something doesn't come from nothing, so who put the life there? That's just a great question that they don't want to answer, but we understand this thing is that you do not have to be a believer to enjoy the riches of the Father.

But those who are near him usually enjoy it twice as much. Just want to put that out there, right? We do not have to enjoy it. We don't have to be a believer, but what we see is the riches that they enjoy. Number two, we see the repentance that they both need.

The repentance that they both need. Now, we're very familiar with the prodigal son because he takes his money and he leaves. It says, and not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey to a distant country.

Let us never miss this where it says distant country, distant country, distant country. So he took the father's riches and separated them from the father, which means if you take what God richly enjoys or richly provides for you and separates it from his presence, then it's always going to run out, right?

There's going to come a day where that runs dry. If you take it to a distant country, as this younger son did, he went to a distant country and there he squandered his estate with loose living. So many people are squandering the riches of the heavenly father that he has provided to them.

[12 : 51] They are not enjoying everything that God has given them. They are not enjoying everything that God has provided freely for them, but yet they take it to a distant land. It says, so he went and he hired himself out. And let's not miss verse 14.

Now, when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country and he began to be impoverished. Now, where did the famine occur? In that country in which he was at. Okay, it didn't occur everywhere, but it occurred in that country.

Now, this story is really full of grace and mercy. And what we see is the prodigal son took his money and he went to a distant country. And God so ordained that in that distant country, after his money ran out, a famine occurred in that distant country.

So that when he was in that country, he would hire himself out in the most humblest of livings. And that would be to feed the swine, which were a Jewish individual. He's speaking to Jewish leaders here, by the way, Pharisees and scribes that would have never been anywhere around pigs or never have even entered a pen of swine.

But yet he sees that he has to do something. So he hires himself out to feed swine. And he would even love to eat what the swine are eating. Friend, I want to tell you, that's a gracious act. And the reason that's a gracious act, because God is good and kind to us when he gives us things that we do not deserve and he allows those things to run their course and run out.

[14 : 06] God is gracious when he puts us in a place of desperation. God is gracious when he puts us in a place of having nothing else to lean upon, because it says, and when he came to his senses, friend, listen, you never come to your senses when everything is going good and well.

You don't come to your senses when everything is easy and everything is kind and everything is perfect and everything is sunshine and butterflies and buttercups, right? You come to your senses when it all runs out and you're looking at something that is most despicable.

You're looking at the swine, not that they're despicable to us, but to him that would have been. And you realize that you're in this land and then all of a sudden you come to your senses and you realize that even your father's hired servants are better off than you. And it is a gracious thing.

The Bible tells us more than once in the prophets, the major prophets and the minor prophets of the Old Testament, that God strikes in order to heal, that he wounds in order to cure, that he causes some pain and discomfort so that he could bring about a healing.

You don't know how much you need a healer until you realize how much you've been hurt. This is what Paul says is the purpose of the law. The law was given as a tutor. What was the law given for?

[15 : 16] To tell you how to be righteous and to tell you how to be holy. Now, by law, I mean what? The Old Testament. Why is the Old Testament even in there, right? People ask, well, why do we even have the Old Testament if everything we live in is New Testament Christianity? Why do we even have the Old Testament?

Because apart from the Old Testament, you would not know how desperate you are. If God did not say, be holy as I am holy and did not show us what holiness looks like, if God did not reveal to us the standard which he has set, then we would never know that we were feeding pigs hoping to eat what they are eating.

We would think that we are okay. We would think that we're perfectly fine, that we're doing better than most, right? That we're getting along just fine, that we're alert laboring and we're working and we'll get to that in just a minute. But until God strikes or wounds or causes a discomfort or a pain or causes a famine in our land, friend, I want to tell you something.

Let us be thankful for the times when God let what we were trusting in run out and he let the water run dry so that we would have to look somewhere else than what we could provide. I gave a moment because that would have been a great place for somebody to say amen, but maybe you've not experienced that, so I will amen myself on that.

I am thankful that he has allowed times in my life when whatever I was counting on ran out and it led me to look beyond myself and it led me to look to the reality that even the angels in my father's house have more than I could ever imagine.

[16 : 34] And I'd rather be a servant in his house than be a master over mine. And what we need to understand is that is a gracious act when God allows us to get to that place of desperation. And the reason I say it is gracious is because we're looking at a tale of two sinners, but there's one who never repented.

And that was the sinner who was living in the father's house with the father's riches and thought everything was okay. The older son never repents. Why? Because he never does without.

The older son never repents because he never misses a meal, he never misses a beat, and he just keeps going through the motions. There's a reason why they tell us that our mission field is not necessarily outside the church, but is inside the church.

And there's a reason why that study after study after study across many denominations and across many broad spectrums revealed to us the reality that we must be intentional of reaching our own people as reaching other people is because it is real easy to get comfortable in God's presence and forget how desperate we really are.

It is real easy to forget how bad off we are if we were not near him. And we will not come to this place of repentance until we realize the pain of our own situation and our own working.

[17 : 48] So here we see the repentance that they both need. Third, we see the reception of the Father. Now we're very familiar with this, right? Because the prodigal son comes to his senses and he's sitting there in a pigsty and he's sitting looking at the pods which the pigs are eating and going, man, that looks good.

And he's waiting. Now I don't, I mean, he's very Jewish, right? I wouldn't be looking at the pods, I'd be looking at the pig. And I'd say, man, it looks like bacon, it looks like sausage, it looks like barbecue, that looks pretty good. But he's Jewish, right? So he's looking at the pods and he says, I'll have anything.

And he's sitting there and he reaches this place of needing something. So he comes to his senses which is really a great divine thing. And he says, I know what I'll do. I will go to my father and I'll say, Father, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

I've sinned against you and against heaven. Now matter of fact, let's back up. Repentance is always this, an acknowledgement of sinning against heaven and sinning against others, right? He said, I've sinned against heaven and you.

Matter of fact, let's just go ahead and stop right here. Your sins are first and foremost an offense and my sins, our sins. Let's put this all together, right? Our sins are first and foremost an offense against heaven.

[18 : 51] It's not that we've offended others. We have first offended a holy God and in the process of offending him, we have hurt others. So our repentance is not just to go ask others for forgiveness.

Our repentance is an acknowledgement of, Father, I have sinned against heaven and you. I have done what is wrong in the courts of heaven and have done what is wrong on the place of earth.

And he says, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. I want to be one of your hired servants. So we know this. So he goes to the Father and on his way to the Father, we understand, we see the biblical truth here that Jesus is teaching us that the Father sees him while he's still a far way off and the Father runs.

Something really unbecoming for a Jewish elder of that time. A Jewish elder would never run because to run you would have to gird up your cloth, right? He would have to take his robe and he would have to tie it up around his waist and have to take off runs.

It's something they just didn't do. It's just really unbecoming but he did it anyway because he saw him because he could care less what all his servants thought of him. Only thing he was focused on at that moment was his son coming towards him, right?

[19 : 50] So the Father runs to him and kisses him and embraces him and hugs him and loves on him and we must never look over this because the son doesn't finish his spiel but he says what he needs to say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and you.

That's enough, right? When you repent, and you tell God what you've done, when I repent and I tell him what I've done, I don't need to give him all these plans. All I must do is say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and you and I've sinned against others and he interrupts me right there.

So thankful for the divine interruptions and the Father says, Stop. I put a ring on his finger, sandals on his feet, put a robe on his back, right? Kill the fatted calf for going to have a party. What a great picture this is of the Father running to the prodigal son, the one that wasted and squandered his money and he throws this huge party but sometimes in that we lose this reality too.

Because as the party starts, the older son, let's not lose sight of him, he's there. What is he doing? Going through the motions of obedience, right? He's in the field. He's working. He's sweating. He's coming up and he hears the party and he hears the dancing and he sees the celebration so he calls the servant and he goes, What's going on?

He says, Well, your brother who is lost has come back. Your brother who is dead has come back to life and your father has killed the fatted calf and we're having a party and he says, So the brother got mad and he stayed there, right? He stayed there. But you read the very next thing.

[21 : 01] He says, And the father went out to him. But I want you to understand that. God doesn't just run after the openly sinful. God also runs after the self-righteous.

Because the father pursued the prodigal and the father went after the self-righteous older son as well. So he pursues the wicked and he pursues the good.

I don't know what your testimony is. My testimony is I was a pretty good guy. I was an all-American good guy, right? I was not really bad. I mean, I did bad things but everybody does bad things, right? I mean, I wasn't openly terrible.

I mean, some of you knew me growing up. I was okay. I mean, you could say, Well, I don't know, but y'all know this, this, this, and this about you. And I would say, Yeah, I know this, this, and we would just have to keep that to ourselves, right? And we were pretty good guys.

I mean, we fit in with, with the society okay. Nobody really looked bad upon us. But I am thankful that God doesn't just pursue the openly wicked that he also pursues us good old boys. Because my goodness was nothing in the courtroom of heaven.

[22 : 02] And what we see here is the father goes to both of them. He didn't just go to the prodigal. He also went to the self-righteous, puffed up, proud, he went to the one who thought of that all together.

He said, Hey, wait a minute. Now, do you see this interchange? I love this interchange, by the way, because we miss it if we're not careful in scripture. Because what we see with this older brother, he says, This son of yours has come back.

What does he do? He separates himself from him, right? Because this is what, you know, the people who do a lot of bad stuff, that's them, that's not us, right? And I love how the father turned that around. He goes, No, this brother of yours was lost and is now found. What he does is he reminds the prideful and the self-righteous that, hey, he's just like you.

I want to tell you something, brothers and sisters in Christ, I don't care who it is that you can think of and I don't care how much bad they're doing right now. I don't care how deep in despair they are. I don't care how much muck and mire they have on their lives.

I don't care what bottom of the barrel and how deep of a pit they're in. The reality is that the worst sinner you can think of is just like us. We all need a father to come to us just as much.

[23 : 11] And he reminded this older son, that's your brother, right? That's not just my son, that's your brother. You're just like him and you're enriched. What we see here is we see the reception of the father.

So thankful that he receives both of them. Fourth and finally, we see the resistance of the self-righteous and this is really when we reach the height of the parable, the resistance of the self-righteous. This older brother comes in and it says in verse 28, but he became angry and was not willing to go in.

And his father came out and began pleading with him and verse 29 says, but he answered and said to his father, look, for so many years I've been serving you and I've never neglected the command of yours. Just stop right there. How many of you actually think that this son had done everything 100% what his dad had told him to do?

How many of you in here, every man in here is a son. How many of you sons did everything your dad, no, but in our reality we like that argument, right? I've always done everything you wanted me to.

Right? I didn't neglect a single command. Why? Because we never see ourselves in our true light. We don't. We love to paint a better picture of ourselves than what is there. I mean, just being honest, maybe I'm the only guy who has that problem, right?

[24 : 28] I would love to paint a better picture of Billy Joe than Billy Joe really is because something within me wants to feel good about me and that's okay but the reality is this son is using this as pride and self-righteousness, right?

Everything's pointing back to himself, right? I have been here. I am serving you. I have never neglected the command of yours and yet you have never, look at this, never given me. He loved him a whole lot of me, right? It's the reality.

You've never given me a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. Whoop! Just stop right there. Pump the brakes just a little bit. Here's what we find out about the self-righteous. The desperate sinner loves to rejoice in the father's presence.

The self-righteous just wants a party and he could care less if the father's there or not. I want you to give me a goat so I can go celebrate with my friends. That desperate sinner, he said, kill the calf.

I'm going to be with the dad. I'm going to be in the father's presence. We're going to dance. We're going to rejoice. We're going to celebrate because I am in his presence. The prideful and the self-righteous is like, I don't care if he's there or not.

[25 : 25] I just want to meet. I want to ask you something, friend. Is it still church if the father's not there? Is it still a good time if God never shows up?

Are we to the point that we can have a party if the father's not there or not as long as he provides the provisions, right? We must be careful. He says to him in verse 31, Son, you have always been with me.

And all that is mine is yours. Remember, he was doubly enriched. But we had to celebrate and rejoice for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live and was lost and has been found.

You know, the silence of Scripture at times kills us because in this account, we don't know how the older son responded. And that's exactly what Jesus was intending for us not to know.

Because he is telling this parable to the Pharisees and the scribes, that is the religious folk, to the self-righteous, to the prideful, for those who are working hard and trying to keep it all together, those who thought they were doing enough and those who are certain that they were favored in God's presence because of all their labor and all their work.

[26 : 36] And Jesus is kind of a cliffhanger. I kind of do that sometimes. My kids pick on me a lot. A lot of times I will say something and I don't finish my sentence because I just expect people to pick up on what I'm saying and they say, Daddy, you've got to finish your thought.

But Jesus does it here on purpose, right? He just leaves it hanging because it's up to the Pharisees and the scribes to determine how they're going to respond to the truth the Father just proclaimed. When the desperate sinner comes back, we have to rejoice.

We have to realize that we're just like him. We need to repent. We need to be in the Father's presence and it's really not a party if the Father's not there. It doesn't matter how many goats or how many calves we have. It's not a party if the Father's not there.

The reality is this. Each of us must answer that same question. When heaven's rejoicing, are we there too? Or are we on the outside standing there going, yeah, but I've been working and I've been laboring and I've done all this and I've done all this but yet I can't, no, I don't want to ask.

Just in all seriousness, really. There's a greater party going on every time we see the baptismal waters stirred in heaven than there is in just about anything else we ever experience.

[27 : 43] I've seen churches when there's a baptism, I mean the church literally breaks out and goes crazy. I mean people get standing up.

I'm not saying that we have to do that. That's not all our personality, right? But is it wrong? No, it's not wrong. That's just saying if heaven's celebrating, I am too. And I'm going to rejoice with heaven and I'm going to go in there and eat some of that fatted calf and I'm going to go dance like nobody's watching and I'm going to rejoice because I know it's not about me, it's about what the Father is doing and that's okay because he pursued me just as much as he pursued any others.

Let's pray. Lord, I thank you for this day and Lord, I thank you for your faithfulness and your goodness and your kindness towards us. Lord, I pray that the truth of scripture would captivate our heart and change our minds and change our lives for your glory and honor.

Lord, may we always be those who celebrate when heaven celebrates, mourn when heaven mourns. Lord, may we be those who draw close to you. Lord, we're thanking you for pursuing us at times where we were standing aloft, Lord, times when we were so separate from you, maybe by our own sin or maybe by our own self-righteousness, but Lord, you pursue us.

Lord, we're thankful for that and we give you the praise for that. We ask it all and pray it all in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.

[29 : 13] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[31 : 43] Thank you.

Thank you.