* **Series Slide**
* In 1967, a 35 year old man was spiraling into crisis.
* His marriage had ended. Once a popular musician, his fame was beginning to fade. He was, yet again, strung out on drugs.
* He was ready to die.
* He had heard about a place near Chattanooga, Nickajack cave.
* It was deep- dark- the perfect place to die.
* His plan was to get lost. He kept going deeper in until the batteries in his flashlight went out. Then he laid down to die.
* He said that he never felt further from God when he walked into that cave.
* But inside that Cave, where he thought he would get lost and meet his death, He met the God who found him.
* He got up, sensing that it wasn’t time to die yet- and miraculously found his way out of the cave in the darkness, with a new dedication to living his life surrendered to God.
* He kicked his drug habit (well, kind of, its complicated)…and he married a woman that would be his wife for next 35 years until they both died within 4 months of each other.
* The next year, after his spiritual awakening in Nickajack Cave. His career experienced its own resurrection.

- When he voluntarily walked into Prison- and recorded his second highest grossing album of all time. A live album entitled-

**Johnny Cash At Folsom Prison.**

I want to draw your attention to the final 2 songs of that concert at Folsom Prision.

The penultimate song is called “The Green Green Grass of Home”.

It's a song about a prisoner who dreams that he gets out of prison and goes home. His wife and his family all come running to meet him and embrace him. But then he wakes up, realizing he’s still in prison- and he may not make out until he dies and is buried underneath the green green grass of home.

It's a song about hope. What every prisoner hopes for- being freed and reuniting with people that love them- that sort of crashes in the sad country song reality of death.

Then on the track, Johnny Cash announces that they are about to play a song for the first time, a song written by one of the inmates at Folsom Prison- a song he was handed just the night before- and had practiced only once with his band. He says, “I hope we do it justice”.

The crowd goes crazy when they hear their fellow inmate “Glenn Shirley” had written the song.

And then Johnny Cash sings “Greystone Chapel”

Here’s some of the lyrics.

**There's a greystone chapel here at Folsom  
A house of worship in this den of sin  
You wouldn't think that God had a place here at Folsom  
But he saved the souls of many lost men  
Now this greystone chapel here at Folsom  
Stands a hundred years old made of granite rock  
It takes a ring of keys to move here at Folsom  
But the door to the House of God is never locked**

* **Inside the walls of prison my body may be  
  But my Lord has set my soul free**

Johnny Cash went into a cave to die. Then he walked out of it- and he went to the prisoners to proclaim the nearness of God and the hope of salvation, freedom, and home going.

He wasn’t the first guy with the initials JC to do that.

Its interesting to listen to the prisoners in the background as Johnny sings Greystone Chapel- specifically to hear when the prisoners cheer the loudest.

There’s 4 times they really get into it.

Once- is at the announcement that one of their own wrote this song. Not only are they proud of him- I think they realize in that moment that what they are about to hear is going to represent them- empathize with them- feel their pain- more than any song they have heard up to that point.

Then- they cheer after Johnny sings that Greystone Chapel is a **“House of Worship in a den of sin”.**

* + Its like an oasis for them- that little chapel. It's a safe place. A sacred place. A place that’s set apart, that even the vilest criminal has come to respect.
* Then- they cheer when Johnny sings “**You wouldn’t think God had a place here at Folsom, but he’s saved the souls of many lost men”**
  + They cheer at the surprising nature of God’s salvation.
  + That God shows up in the darkness of caves at the brink of suicide…
  + …and in prisons where he changed hardened criminals.
* Finally, they cheer- maybe the most loudly- at the line “**The door to house of God is never locked”**
  + They cheer at the unlimited access- the come as you are- and come anytime attitude of God that they only found when they were locked up- when every other door needed special permission to access…that’s when they appreciated how ready God was to have them come into his house.
* What happened in 1968 at Folsom Prison was a party. It was a celebration.
* The prisoners sang- danced- cheered God’s nearness- his openness, availability and his surprising salvation. And they dreamt- they looked hopefully to the future when they would once again touch the green green grass of home before they died.
* **Title Slide**- **Nickajack to Folsom: How the Losers Celebrate- Luke 15**
* Today, is the last day of our celebration series- before we kickoff our a year of celebrating a decade of ministry here in Murfreesboro.
* So I want to end this series today talking about the BEST kinds of celebrations.
* Celebrating when the lost are found- when the dead are alive- when hopeless find salvation- and when the prisoners are freed.
* This is not only what we love to celebrate- its What God loves to celebrate.
* **Luke 15**
* **All the tax collectors and sinners were approaching to listen to him.**
* **2 And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”**
* **3 So he told them this parable: 4 “What man among you, who has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open field and go after the lost one until he finds it? 5 When he has found it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, 6 and coming home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep! ’ 7 I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who don’t need repentance.**
* **8 “Or what woman who has ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? 9 When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found the silver coin I lost! ’ 10 I tell you, in the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels over one sinner who repents.”**
* **11 He also said, “A man had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.’ So he distributed the assets to them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. 14 After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. 15 Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to eat his fill from the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything. 17 When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I’ll get up, go to my father, and say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. 19 I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers.” ’ 20 So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. 21 The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son.’**
* **22 “But the father told his servants, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let’s celebrate with a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! ’ So they began to celebrate.**
* **25 “Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant. 27 ‘Your brother is here,’ he told him, ‘and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’**
* **28 “Then he became angry and didn’t want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 But he replied to his father, ‘Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’**
* **31 “‘Son,’ he said to him, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”**
* **Transition:** When I first read about Johnny Cash going from Nickajack Cave to Folsom Prison- Luke 15 was all I could think about. Because those prisoners were singing and cheering the same thing that the all the characters in these 3 stories that Jesus tells are celebrating.
* And City Church- its what we have gotten the most excited about here over the last 10 years- and what I’m praying with celebrate more often and with more passion over the next 10 years.
* So lets take a look at these celebrations- because I want go crazy like this shepherd, this coin collecting lady, and this Dad when his son comes home…and I want to do it over and over and over and over for the next 10 years.
* **1) Nobody celebrates like losers that find what they lost.**
  + I’ve read Luke 15 literally hundreds of times I my life.
  + I’m VERY familiar with this passage.
  + But, I just realized something about it this week.
  + I always thought of the lost son who was found as happiest person in all these stories.
  + After all, he was the one who was good as dead- and then got it all back in the end.
  + But, actually that’s not what this passage shows.
  + Actually- we don’t really get any commentary from the son regarding his celebration- or his relief- or joy.
  + It's only the Father’s celebration- his relief and joy we get.
  + Then I looked at the other 2 stories in the chapter. And realized- this whole chapter was never really about how relieved the lost are to be found.
  + Its about the joy of those that have lost something when they find it again.
  + The first story isn’t about the lost sheep- its about the shepherd- he’s the loser.
  + The second story isn’t about the coin- its about the woman- she’s the loser.
  + And the third story isn’t about the son- Sure- he’s lost- but he’s the coin, he’s the sheep- He’s not the loser- he’s the lost.
  + The loser is the FATHER.
  + THE LOSERS ARE ALL THE ONE’s THAT CELEBRATE the hardest and with the most gusto.
  + And think about who Jesus is telling this story to.
  + **V 1-2**
  + He’s talking to the Pharisees and scribes.
  + People who refuse to see themselves as losers.
  + They look down their noses at the tax collectors and sinners- those are the losers.
  + In fact, in the story of the Father and the 2 sons- The older brother represents the Pharisees and Scribes
  + **V 28**
  + The older son, lie the Pharisees, get angry at sinners and tax collectors and younger, wasteful brothers.
  + They don’t celebrate when they come home.
  + Because to the older brother- when the younger brother left- he didn’t see himself as a loser. As someone who lost a brother.
  + He only saw him as competition. Someone to compare himself to.
  + **V 29-30**
  + In the older son’s eyes- its actually a win that his little brother ran off and wasted his inheritance…because in his mind- it makes him look like a winner. Just look at the comparison at the end of this story.
  + I never disobeyed. I served you for all these years. YOU never gave me a party.
  + HE devoured your assets. HE slept with prostitutes. And HE GETS THE PARTY.
  + Do you see that? the Older brother views his little brother’s terrible choices as ways to highlight his awesomeness.
  + You know who this reminds me of?
  + Remember the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis chapter 4. Cain sees Abel as competition, instead of as a brother.
  + So he murders him- he gets rid of him.
  + And then God asks where his brother is and Cain answers “am I my brother’s keeper?”
  + The answer to that question is actually YES.
  + There should have been a sense “We are family. I am yours and you are mine. And if you runaway- its not my gain- Its my lost. I’ve LOST YOU. I’m THE LOSER.
  + Instead, Cain has the attitude of “I Have eliminated my competition”
* **Back to 1)**
  + When the Pharisees, the religious elite, look at the tax collectors and sinners- they don’t see their own. They don’t feel like they are looking at brothers and sisters they have lost-
  + They see the worst of society that just make them- in all their righteous behavior- look better.
  + And so- you never really catch them- anywhere in gospels- celebrating. Only complaining about the wrong people showing up to the party.
  + But the loser shepherd who goes looking for his sheep.
  + And the loser woman who frantically sweeps the house looking for her coin.
  + And the loser Dad- who sits on his front porch praying his son will again touch the green green grass of home.
  + They throw parties.
  + They have joy.
  + They celebrate.
  + Do you know why its easier to be a Pharisee- an older brother- than to the Dad, a shepherd, or the woman in these parables.
  + Because it hurts to be a loser.
  + It hurts to watch your kids destroy themselves.
  + It hurts to watch your brother walk away.
  + It hurts to be a loser.
  + Its much easier- it feels better- to be in competition- to celebrate the demise of a perceived rival.
  + But the thing is- if you don’t look at people who have made bad decisions- who have walked away from you- from Jesus… if you don’t take personal stock in their life…
  + YOU ARE NEVER GOING TO CELEBRATE- You are never going to PARTY like God intends you to.
  + The less invested you are in someone else- sure, the less pain you’ll probably feel. You’ll just say “I have my 99 sheep…the real loser is the one who walked away.”
  + But you are leaving a lot of future joy on the table.
  + This is what the prisoners cheered in Glenn Shirley’s song about Greystone Chapel.
  + “**You wouldn’t think God had a place here at Folsom, but he’s saved the souls of many lost men”**
  + You wouldn’t think God had a place in a prison.
  + You wouldn’t think Jesus would eat with sinners.
  + You wouldn’t think a shepherd would leave 99 safe sheep to find a lost one.
  + But that’s what losers do. They get in the dirt. They hug sons covered in pig mud.
  + You wouldn’t think God had a place at Folsom. But God himself is a loser- who came to seek and save the lost.
* **Transition**: So what can you do now- to get invested. To become a loser instead of an older brother? Well…
* **2) Nobody celebrates like those who risk, work & wait for the lost.**
  + The people who celebrate in these stories do exactly that.
  + **V 4**
  + The shepherd leaves 99 sheep to go after 1.
  + There is risk involved.
  + Someone could come while he is away and steal the other sheep. A hungry wolf could show up.
  + What Jesus is showing is that the Kingdom of God is not made up of people that conservatively just sit on what they have- but aggressively go after those who are lost.
  + When Johnny Cash and his band walked into Folsom Prison- they were warned by the warden that the prison could not guarantee their safety. Nobody knew what to expect.
  + But Johnny Cash- having known what its like for God to find him in a dark cave- risked walking into that prison- because he wanted to celebrate. And celebration is multiplied by investment. By risk.
  + And nobody celebrates like those who work to find the lost.
  + **V 8**
  + The woman…loses one coin. She still has 9 she could sit on.
  + But she goes to work. She burns fuel in the lamp. She sweeps.
  + She moves furniture.
  + She is unstoppable.
  + And that makes the payoff so much sweeter.
* **Back to 2)**
  + A couple of years ago- my favorite video game went missing.
  + Mario Odyssey for the Nintendo Switch.
  + I love that game.
  + I went all over the house. For days. Weeks. Everyday. Couch cushions. Nooks. Crannies.
  + Nothing.
  + I could not figure out what happened to it.
  + About a 9 months later- Keva was in the hall closet (which is the closet that goes under our stairs, so its really deep and dark…a lot like Nickajack Cave…and she was in there pulling something out…and she screams- “LOOK WHAT I FOUND!”
  + It was Mario Odyssey.
  + At no other time in our marriage as Keva EVER picked up a video game and handed it to me with such joy.
  + BUT, because she knew the work I put into finding it…the moment she laid her hands on it- we celebrated.
  + (Sidenote: IT remains one of life’s greatest mysteries what joker buried that thing back there. I also think it's a little suspicious that KEVA is the one who conveniently FOUND IT)
  + Or you ever watch a sports team win a championship?
  + When they celebrate- they aren’t just celebrating that game.
  + They are celebrating a whole year of work outs- two a day practices…sweat, injury, pain- they are celebrating the end of journey. A homecoming. The journey completed.
  + **V 20**
  + And the Father- sees his son while he’s a long way off.
  + You know what that means? He was looking.
  + Sitting on the front porch- waiting.
  + Staring at the place where the road met the horizon. Hoping. Praying. Fighting to believe his son would come home.
  + Not panicking- waiting.
  + And boy, that day, when his son’s head started to bob over the horizon. When he was a speck on that road- along way off.
  + That kicked off a celebration like that ranch had never seen.
  + Because when you risk, work, and wait to find the lost…YOU THROW PARTIES WHEN MARIO is done with his ODYSSEY and TOUCHES THE GREEN GREEN GRASS of Home.
* Transition: Finally- let’s take a look at the celebrations themselves.
* **3) Losers who become Finders celebrate generously. Everyone else complains and gets angry.** 
  + Less than a year after God found Johnny Cash in Nickajack cave- Cash walked into Folsom Prison to throw a party.
  + That’s because when God finds you, and changes you…he moves you out of the center of your life…and gives you the heart of a loser.
  + He ties your heart to his- to go into all the world and make disciples.
  + To seek and save the lost.
  + God is like a tornado- he never brings you in without sending you back out.
  + God doesn’t just save us from ourselves to sit and be comfortable with 99 sheep and 9 coins and one son.
  + He gives us a heart to feel that someone is missing from the family. That there is another brother or sister to bring into the house.
  + That’s why Johnny Cash went into that Prison. That’s why he sang Glenn Shirley’s song.
  + That's why he sang Green Green Grass of Home.
  + He knew the men in that prison were lost. Folsom prison was their Nickajack cave. It was their under the stairs closet in their own Mario Odyssey.
  + So Johnny Cash overflowed- in a generous celebration that gave hope to those prisoners.
  + Look at the celebrations in this text.
  + **V 6 & 9**
  + The shepherd and the woman call their friends and neighbors to rejoice with them.
  + Now there are no phones. No texts. No Remind app or E-vites.
  + This is a shepherd and a woman going door to door saying, “Lets have a party! Lets Celebrate!”
  + Its overflow. Its “I can’t keep this to myself”.
  + Its costly celebration. There is effort in it- but its all done in joy.
  + **V 22-23**
  + And look at the Father who finds his son.
  + He inivites EVERYBODY to a costly feast.
  + Remember- this guys net worth has already been significantly eaten into by his younger son.
  + But he doesn’t say, “Well, I’m happy you’re home, but you already threw yourself a party- so back to work!”
  + No, he spares no expense. Its extravagant, generous outpouring that includes- and watch this- even the people who weren’t waiting like he was.
  + **V 28 & 31**
  + He makes a point to go out, and invite the older son in.
  + Yes, the son that saw his brother as competition.
  + The son that said “Good Riddance” to his brother.
  + The Father has so much joy- he wants to share it even with the son who is acting like a brat.
  + Kind of like Jesus washing Judas’ feet.
  + **v 2**
  + Contrast this with Pharisees and Scribes.
  + They are complaining and angry.
  + Just like the older brother.
  + Guys- I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen this.
  + There are 2 kinds of people in the church.
  + Those that risk, work, and wait patiently- on mission to find the lost.
  + And those that get angry and complain about what they aren’t getting.
  + You will eventually become one of those two people.
  + Johnny Cash’s grateful for your rescue from Nickajack Cave and Throwing Parities in Folsom Prison…
  + Or you’ll complain about all the ways the church isn’t throwing parties for you.
* **Back to 3)**
  + 4 chapters later, in Luke 19, Jesus goes to this tax collectors house. His name is Zaccehus.
  + Everybody hates Zaccehus.
  + Everybody complains about how Zaccehus has treated them.
  + But Jesus goes to eat with Zaccheus.
  + And Zacceheus’ response is overflow. Its generous.
  + He gives half of his possesions to the poor.
  + God met Zaccheus in Nickajack- and Zaccheus goes to Folsom Prison to celebrate.
  + **Luke 19:7**
  + And look peopl who saw Jesus go to Zaccheus- they complained.
  + **19:9-10**
  + But Jesus says, “No- Zacceheus is our brother- a son of Abraham our Father- And I’m the older brother who didn’t complain. But put myself in the place of the loser- so I could be a finder…and Celebrate with the lost who are found.
  + The son of man came to seek and save the lost.
* **Back to 3)**
  + He is the good shepherd that laid down his life for the sheep.
  + Jesus is Greystone Chapel- the presence of God, the unlocked door to the Kingdom of God in the middle of our prison of sin and selfishness.
  + Jesus is the woman sweeping for the coin.
  + Turning over every piece of furniture that keeps you from God, to bring you home.
  + Jesus us Glenn Shirley. He put himself in the prison of this broken world. He has experienced the suffering and darkness of poverty, lack, betrayal, abuse… and so when he writes a song about redemption- you can cheer it. Because Jesus is one of us.
  + And Jesus is the presence of God that met Johnny Cash- the other JC in Nickajack Cave.
  + And he’s looking for you today.
  + Will you follow the good shepherd out of the cave- into Folsom Prison to be Greystone Chapel with him- to seek the lost- and then on to the Green Green Grass of home- to embraced by Your Heavenly Father who has waited so paitiently for you to come to your senses…and come home.
  + The party is waiting.
  + Will you stay outside angry and complaining…
  + Or come in and rejoice?