

Guest Speaker: Dr. Chris Williamson
Bridgeway Community Church
Series: Winter Guest Speaker Series
February 4, 2024

WINTER GUEST SPEAKER SERIES:

“Ain’t No Party Like a Bridgeway Party!” (Dr. Chris Williamson)

I. INTRODUCTION

The Great King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 3:1

- “*For everything there is a season...*” (ESV)

There are various seasons that come in the life of individuals and the life of organizations.

When I think of organizations, churches and the seasons they go through, I refer to them as seasons of...

- **STORMING**
- **FORMING**
- **NORMING; and**
- **TRANSFORMING**

Our church – Strong Tower Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee – is currently in a season of FORMING. That’s because we’ve just come out of a season of TRANSFORMING. Our Vision as a church is to “expand God’s diverse Kingdom in the city and throughout the world.” After a season of going hard in the pursuit of our Vision, we’ve experienced much fruitfulness and transformation. But isn’t it true that even when you’re experiencing fruitfulness, it doesn’t mean you won’t also go through a season of pruning.

In fact, God will often *prune you* so that you can bear even more fruit. Well God cut us coming out of our season of TRANSFORMING, so please, pray for us as we are in this season of pruning and FORMING.

I’m here to celebrate Bridgeway, which I believe is in a season of TRANSFORMING. I say this because, as an outsider, I see you in a **Winning Season**. There is an environment in this church in which God is manifesting his glory and presence in this House in exponential ways.

Bridgeway, you are in a Winning Season, and that means it is a great time for folks to COME HOME... *because there is a party in the house!*

My Title for Today's Sermon is:
"Ain't No Party Like a Bridgeway Party!"

And one of the best stories in the Bible that depicts this kind of "*coming home*" party is Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son. Now, there are actually two kinds of parties in this story...

- 1. A Party of Sinners**
- 2. A Party of the Religious Syndicate**

One is a Praise Party...

The other is a Pity Party.

This is a story of two brothers, and the Elder Brother (who we will be focusing on today) doesn't need to COME HOME, because he already *is* Home. His problem is he won't come to the party.

You know this story: a father has two sons and the younger of them asks for his inheritance from the father, goes out and spends it all on reckless living. He lost everything and found himself eating what picks ate. He comes to his senses, returning home, and his father receives him warmly and graciously. But it was the Older Brother who was already at home who had a problem with the party being thrown in his brother's honor.

The 7th Saying of a Gracist – from Dr. Anderson's book, *Gracism* – says: "I Will Celebrate with You." The Older Brother was HOME... but he was not participating in the CELEBRATION.

He needed to grow in being a Gracist!

As Bridgeway is in a *winning* and *gaining* season, one or two of you here may be in a *whining* and *complaining* season. Since if your church is anything like my church, there might be some haters in the house who can't put their hands together to celebrate what God is doing in the lives of other people in the Family of God. So today, I want to join the Elder Brother to join the party rather than standing on the outside with his arms crossed.

Main Point:
God wants all the Prodigals away from home to COME HOME...
And He wants all the Prodigals at home to JOIN THE PARTY

So let's look at Jesus' parable together...

II. A PARABLE OF TWO PARTIES

- *Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." (Luke 15:1-2 NKJV)*

These are two groups of people who come to hear Jesus... the Pharisees and the Sinners. The Sinners are coming to hear, and the Pharisees are coming to complain. So Jesus tells three stories to capture the heart and attention of his hearers.

- The Parable of the Lost Sheep
- The Parable of the Lost Coin
- The Parable of the Lost Sons

And in this last parable, Jesus goes into an elaborate story where he aims directly at the Pharisees and the Scribes. *Both* sons were wrong... but the father invites *both* sons to the party.

However, it seems like only one son accepted the invitation. The parable ends in **verse 32**, without us knowing whether the Older Son ever came into the party after the father went out and pleaded for him to join.

Jesus left his hearers with a cliffhanger, so the Religious could see themselves in the position of the Older Brother. The Sinners were enjoying the grace of God, while the Religious were standing outside and refusing to join the party because they were *offended*.

This sermon can be applied not only to churches but also to homes. A family can have a house but not a home! It can apply to workplaces, where competition is the thief of contentment!

My first point...

1. If You're Going to Join the Party, You Must Get Over Your ANGER

When the Older Brother heard the sound of the homecoming party, Jesus said...

- *"He was ANGRY and would not go in" (Luke 15:28 NKJV).*

He was home, but he wouldn't join the party! This reminds me of the Book of Genesis, where Cain kills his brother Abel because he was filled with anger and bitterness (see Genesis 4).

Question:

Who are my Older Brothers and Sisters in the House?

God wants to heal you and free you so you can join the party. A bad attitude will keep you from having a good time! *People who have a hard time appreciating the grace of God the Father FOR THEM, will struggle to appreciate the Father's grace FOR OTHERS.*

We have to get over our anger. But there's a second thing we need to get over...

2. If You're Going to Join the Party, You Must Get Over Your AMPLIFICATION

Look at what the Older Brother says to his father next...

- *"Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends."* **(Luke 15:29 NKJV)**

Remember who Jesus is talking to. He's talking to the Religious Leaders who in their self-righteousness don't realize there are logs all up in their eye and that they, too, are commandment breakers. Think of the Rich Young Ruler: he thought he had kept *all* the commandments, until Jesus told him to sell everything he owned and to follow him.

And the Bible says...

- *"He went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."* **(Matthew 19:22 NKJV)**

He amplified his own righteousness, thinking he kept all of the commandments, when in fact he couldn't even keep the first – he had made a god of his own wealth! (see Exodus 20:3)

Likewise, the Older Brother *amplified* his own self-righteousness and he *amplified* his father's perceived imperfections...

- *"You NEVER gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends..."* **(Luke 15:29 NKJV)**

Be careful about making those amplifying pronouncements: "I ALWAYS do this, but you NEVER do that." We've all got an Older Brother within us, and the first step of healing is to admit it. Now let's look at the final thing we need to get over...

3. If You're Going to Join the Party, You Must Get Over Your ASSUMPTIONS

Next, the Older Brother said to his father...

- *"But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him." (Luke 15:30 NKJV)*

Now, my question is – if you just showed up to the party, *how do you know* that your brother devoured the father's livelihood with prostitutes?

- Are you just assuming this because you know your brother's proclivities from way back when?
- Are you assuming this because you know what you would do if you were in his position?

When Older Brothers project and perpetuate a false narrative, it only hurts the family! Now the community will hear this, but the Older Brother has no proof that it is true!

As Older Brothers, we have to be careful about making assumptions about people's motives when only God knows the heart. We have to be careful not to put anything in the atmosphere that will hurt and hinder a person getting along with the community.

- **It's been said:** *"Before the Truth gets out of bed and puts its shoes on, a Lie has run around the earth two times!"*

III. REVIEW AND CONCLUSION

So, to review what we've said so far. In order to join in the party God's throwing, you have to...

1. GET OVER YOUR ANGER

- You have to confess it and ask the Lord for forgiveness. With the grace the Lord gives you, extend to others...

2. GET OVER YOUR AMPLIFICATION

- Watch the words you use when describing a situation, especially those words "Always" and "Never"...

3. GET OVER YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

- Get over your assumptions about people and what they have or have not done...

Summary:
GET OVER YOURSELF

So what do you think? Did the Older Brother stay outside, or did he join in the party?

Question:
What will YOU do?

You're Home... *You're here...* But will you join the party?

You're in a TRANSFORMING season. God has been blessing your church in extraordinary ways and while the majority are in the flow of the Spirit, I came from Nashville to speak to the few of you who are having no fun being here.

ILLUSTRATION - At every house party I went to in high school, there would always be some people standing outside of the house. And you had to walk past all of them to get into the party.

Question:
Why would you come to the party but not *go into* the party?

My Bridgeway family, please come into the party!

All of heaven backflips when a sinner comes home to God! So if you think *this* is a party, you better see the party in heaven that Jesus is preparing!

We are going to have white gowns that symbolize the righteousness that has been imputed to the saints, and we are going to have a good time in heaven!

But in the meantime, *there ain't no party like a Bridgeway party...*

Because a BRIDGEWAY party don't stop!