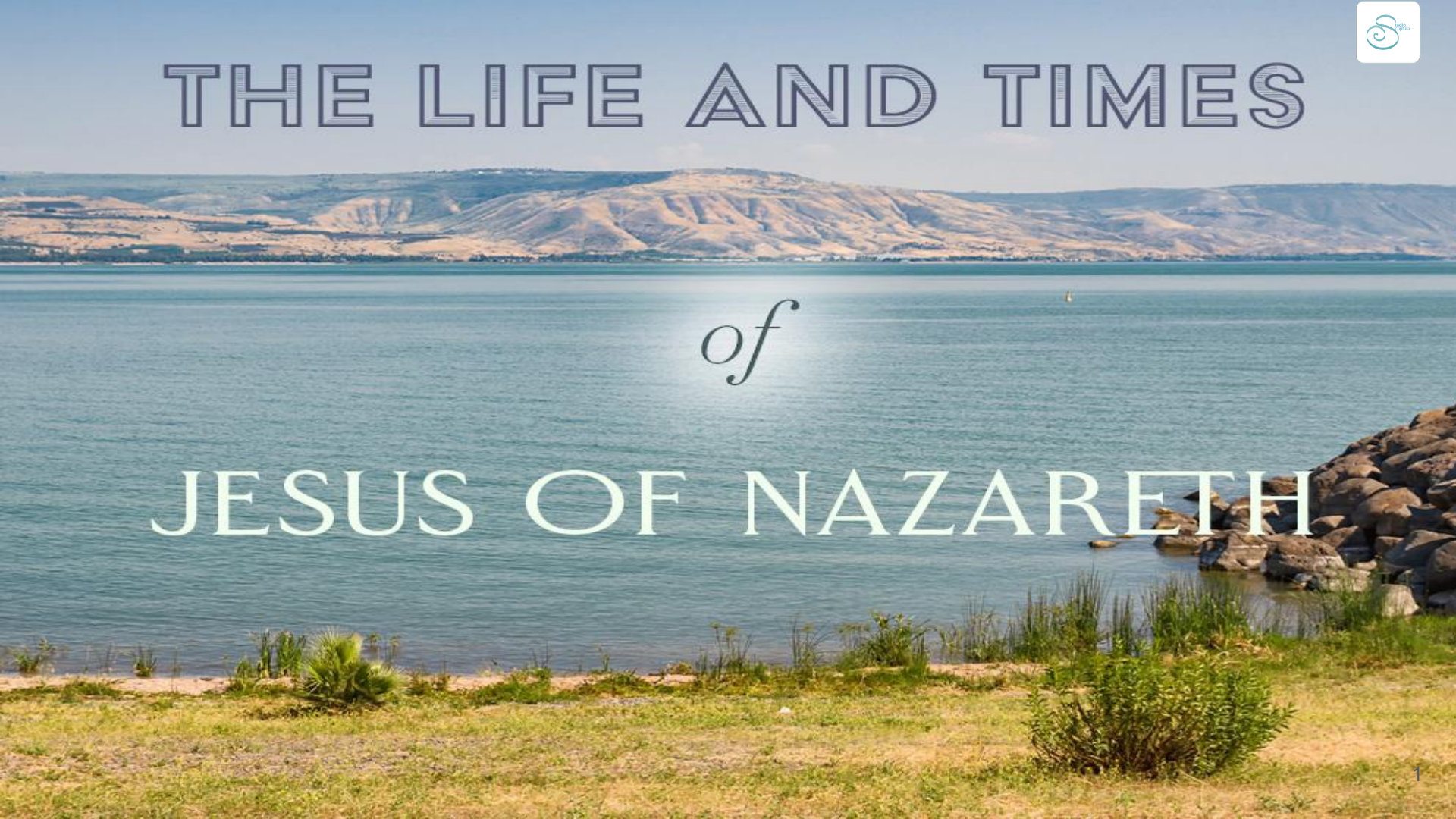
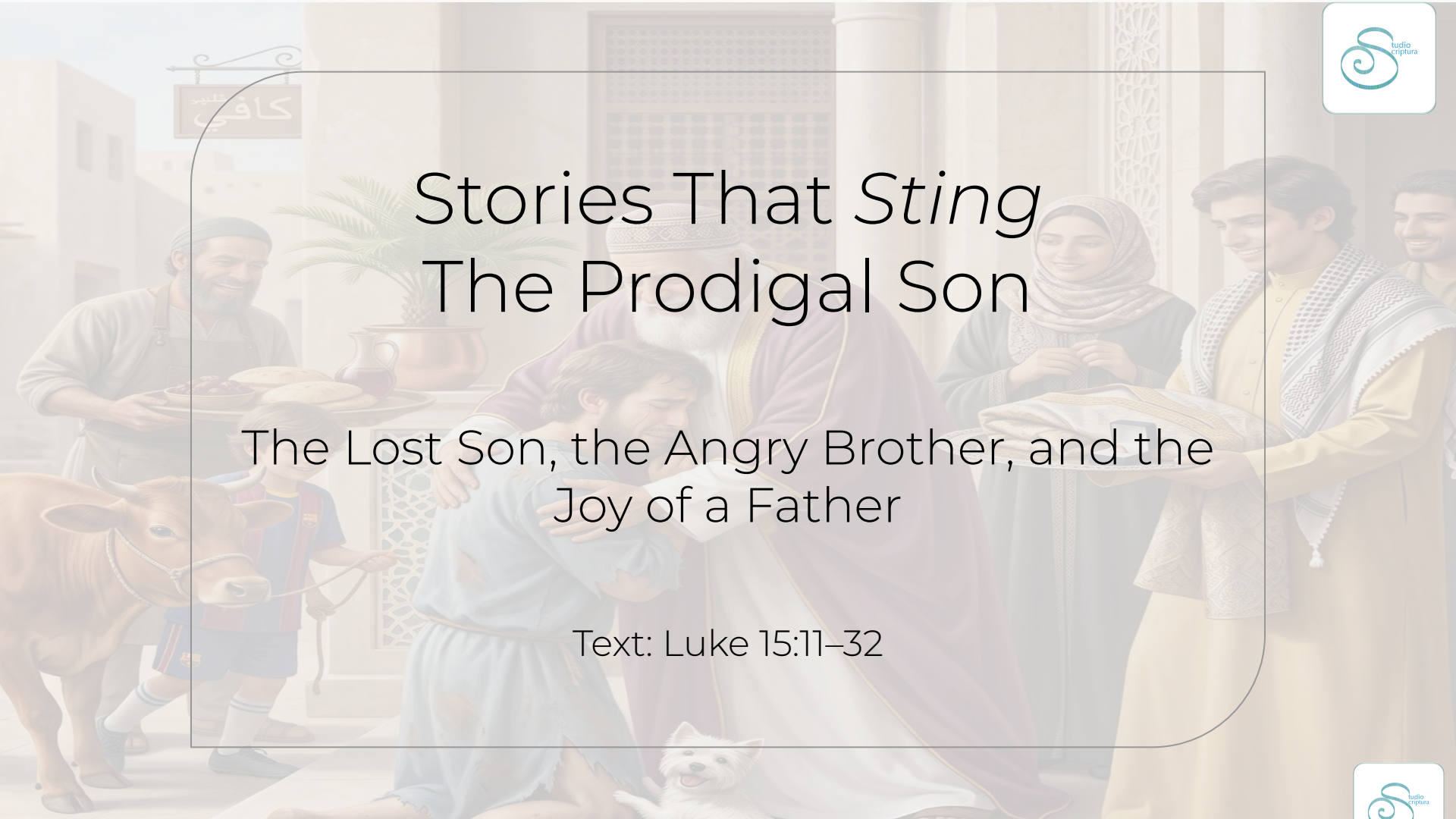

THE LIFE AND TIMES
of
JESUS OF NAZARETH



Stories That *Sting*
The Prodigal Son

The Lost Son, the Angry Brother, and the Joy of a Father

Text: Luke 15:11–32

Few stories Jesus ever told have entered the vocabulary of the world as deeply as the Parable of the *Prodigal Son*. People who have never carefully read the Gospels still know the expression and the general outline of the story. A son or daughter abandons the family, rejects everything they have been taught, makes a disaster of life, and eventually returns home. We call that person a *prodigal son*.

The word *prodigal* originally refers not primarily to someone who leaves home but to someone who is recklessly extravagant and wasteful. A prodigal acts as though money, relationships, opportunities, and even life itself are inexhaustible. Jesus did not use the English word *prodigal*, of course. Luke describes the younger son as living wastefully, recklessly, and without restraint.

The influence of this story has been so immense that *prodigal son* has come to describe anyone who has wandered far from home, relationships, identity, and calling.

Think about the extraordinary influence of Jesus as a teacher. In one relatively brief story, He created an image so powerful that two thousand years later the world still recognizes the story of the Prodigal Son. Along with the Good Samaritan, this is one of the two best-known parables Jesus ever told.

But familiarity can also be dangerous. We can know the broad outline so well that we no longer hear the story and the message of Jesus to us today. A young man leaves home. He wastes his money. He feeds pigs. He comes to his senses and returns. His father hugs him. Everyone lives happily ever after.

But that is not really the point of the story that Jesus told.

The parable does not end with everyone living happily ever after. It ends with one son inside the house and another son standing outside. The father has gone out to both of them, but Jesus never tells us whether the older son enters and accepts his brother's return.

The younger son is lost through open rebellion. The older son is lost in religious self-righteousness. One breaks the rules and runs away and is in his father's debt. The other keeps the rules and believes that his obedience has placed his father in his debt. One is alienated from the father in a distant country. The other is alienated while living and working on the father's property.

But the controlling question of Luke 15 is not merely, "How do both these two sons respond to the father?" The controlling question is, "How do we share in the joy of God when the lost are found?"

Within our broad chronology we are now in the later period of Jesus' ministry, the journey toward Jerusalem that Luke marks at 9:51. By the time we reach chapter 15, most place Jesus in Perea, east of the Jordan. These three stories are therefore sometimes called the *Perean parables*. He has now steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and the religious leaders continue murmuring about the very thing He came to do: receive sinners and eat with them.

The shadow of Jerusalem and the cross now fall across Jesus' life and remaining ministry. Jesus knows He is moving toward rejection, suffering, and the cross. He is moving toward the place where the religious leaders will condemn Him for receiving the very sinners He came to save.

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

That complaint is the doorway into what follows. Jesus is not telling an abstract or sentimental story about a troubled family with a *happily-ever-after ending*. He is answering an accusation. Tax collectors and sinners are drawing near to Jesus, while the Pharisees and scribes stand at a distance, watching and condemning. “This Man receives sinners.” Not only does He receive them. He eats with them.

In that culture (as in many today) sharing a meal with someone communicated fellowship and welcome. Jesus is not merely allowing sinful people to remain somewhere at the edge of the crowd. He permits them to draw near. He treats them as people who may repent, be forgiven, and be restored to fellowship with God.

The religious leaders find this scandalous. They do not deny that these people are sinners, and Jesus does not deny it either. The question is what God does when sinners turn toward Him. Must they first prove themselves? Must they endure an extended period of humiliation? Must they earn their way back into respectable religious society? Must the religious leaders supervise the process and determine whether the sinner has shown sufficient remorse, demonstrated enough obedience, and conformed adequately to their standards?

Jesus answers their complaint with three connected parables. A shepherd loses one sheep out of one hundred - and rejoices when the one is found. A woman loses one coin out of ten - and rejoices when the one is found. And our parable today: a father has two sons, one of whom abandons the household while the other refuses to share his father's joy. The ratio intensifies. One out of one hundred. One out of ten. And now finally, one out of two, followed by the discovery that the second son is separated from his father in heart.

The shepherd rejoices when the sheep is found. The woman rejoices when the coin is found. Jesus explicitly says: “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents.” And again: “There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

By the time Jesus begins the story of the father and his two sons, we already know the subject. This is a parable about lostness, repentance, recovery, and the joy of heaven. The Pharisees have complained, “This Man receives sinners.” Jesus answers, in effect, “Yes. And let Me show you how heaven itself responds when a sinner comes home.”

We pause to remind ourselves that Jesus frequently taught through parables. A parable is a true-to-life story constructed to communicate spiritual truth, expose the condition of the heart, answer a question, and compel the hearer to reach a verdict.

Parables make truth visible. They take truth that might otherwise remain abstract and allow us to watch it unfold in ordinary life. They make truth plain to those willing to hear, while the proud and unresponsive may understand the plot perfectly and still fail to recognize themselves within it.

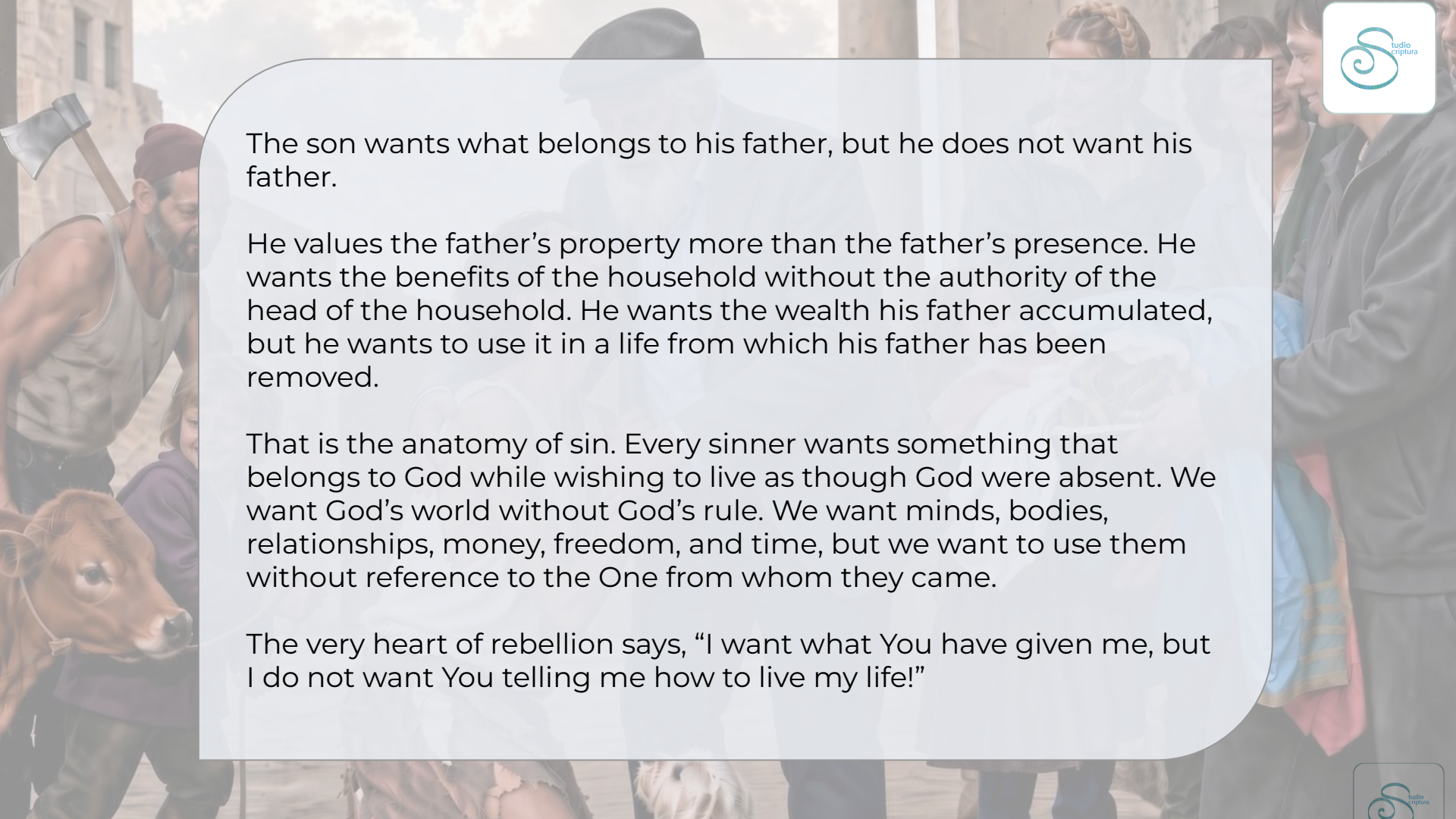
Parables always have an intended message.

Parables, in short, are stories that sting!

Jesus begins: “A certain man had two sons.” Those opening words tell us that we must pay attention to both sons. The younger son speaks first: “Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.”

Under the inheritance principle reflected in Deuteronomy 21:17, the firstborn son ordinarily received a double portion. With two sons, the estate would generally be divided into three shares. The older son would receive two, and the younger son one. The younger son could therefore anticipate approximately one-third of the estate.

But the father is still alive! The law established the ordinary division of an inheritance, but the younger son’s demand for an immediate distribution while his father was still living was profoundly dishonoring.

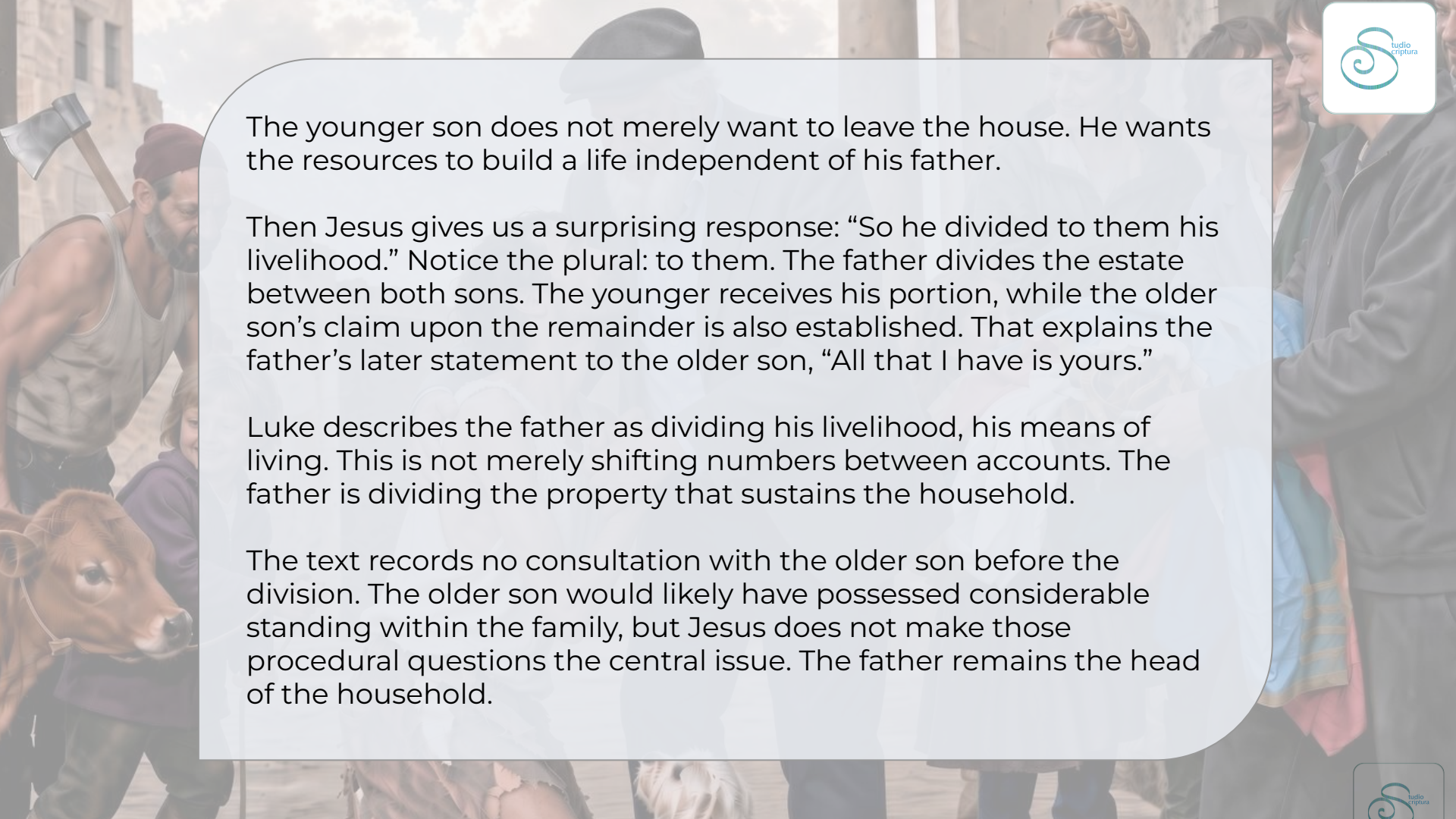


The son wants what belongs to his father, but he does not want his father.

He values the father's property more than the father's presence. He wants the benefits of the household without the authority of the head of the household. He wants the wealth his father accumulated, but he wants to use it in a life from which his father has been removed.

That is the anatomy of sin. Every sinner wants something that belongs to God while wishing to live as though God were absent. We want God's world without God's rule. We want minds, bodies, relationships, money, freedom, and time, but we want to use them without reference to the One from whom they came.

The very heart of rebellion says, "I want what You have given me, but I do not want You telling me how to live my life!"

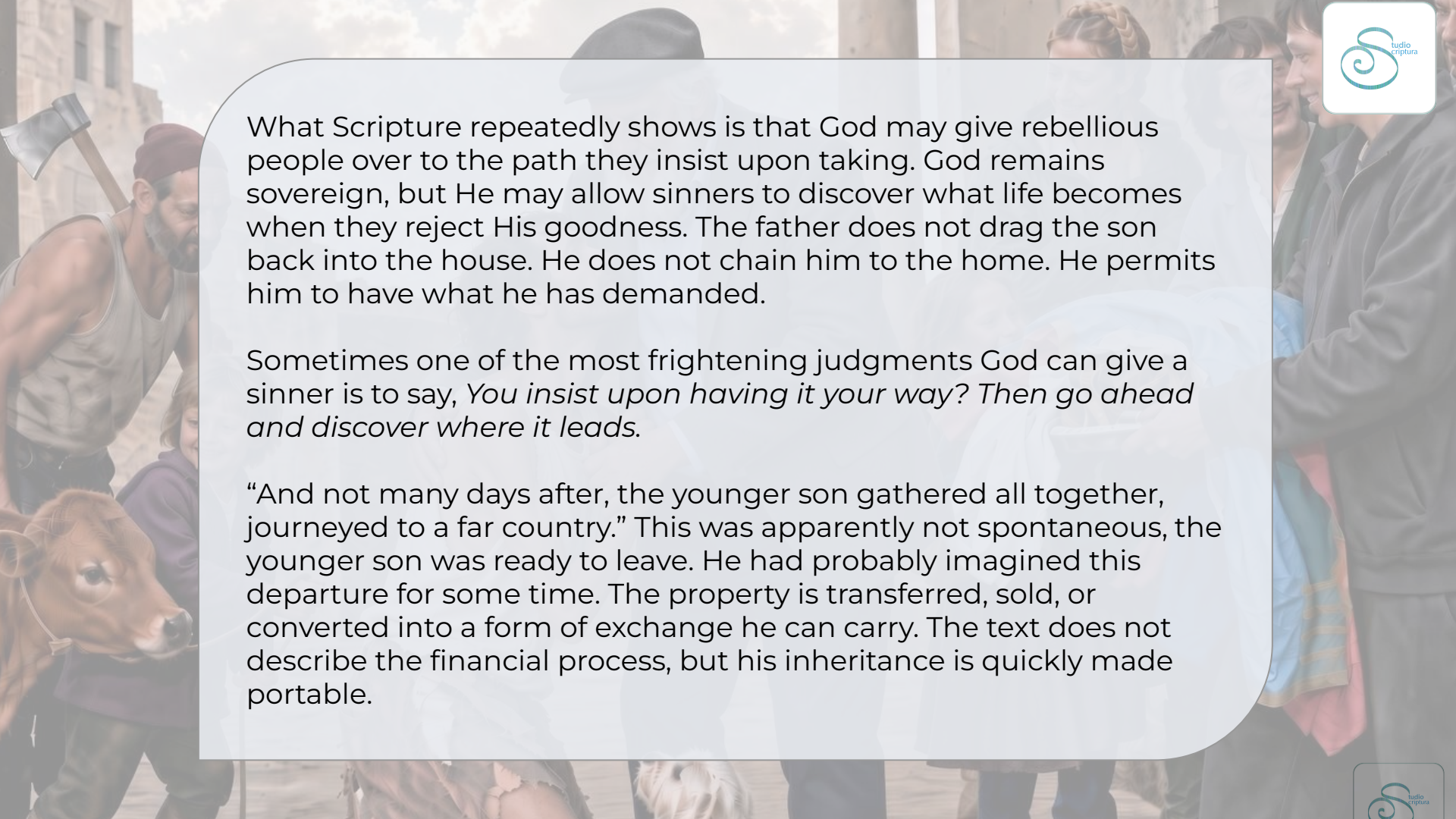


The younger son does not merely want to leave the house. He wants the resources to build a life independent of his father.

Then Jesus gives us a surprising response: “So he divided to them his livelihood.” Notice the plural: to them. The father divides the estate between both sons. The younger receives his portion, while the older son’s claim upon the remainder is also established. That explains the father’s later statement to the older son, “All that I have is yours.”

Luke describes the father as dividing his livelihood, his means of living. This is not merely shifting numbers between accounts. The father is dividing the property that sustains the household.

The text records no consultation with the older son before the division. The older son would likely have possessed considerable standing within the family, but Jesus does not make those procedural questions the central issue. The father remains the head of the household.



What Scripture repeatedly shows is that God may give rebellious people over to the path they insist upon taking. God remains sovereign, but He may allow sinners to discover what life becomes when they reject His goodness. The father does not drag the son back into the house. He does not chain him to the home. He permits him to have what he has demanded.

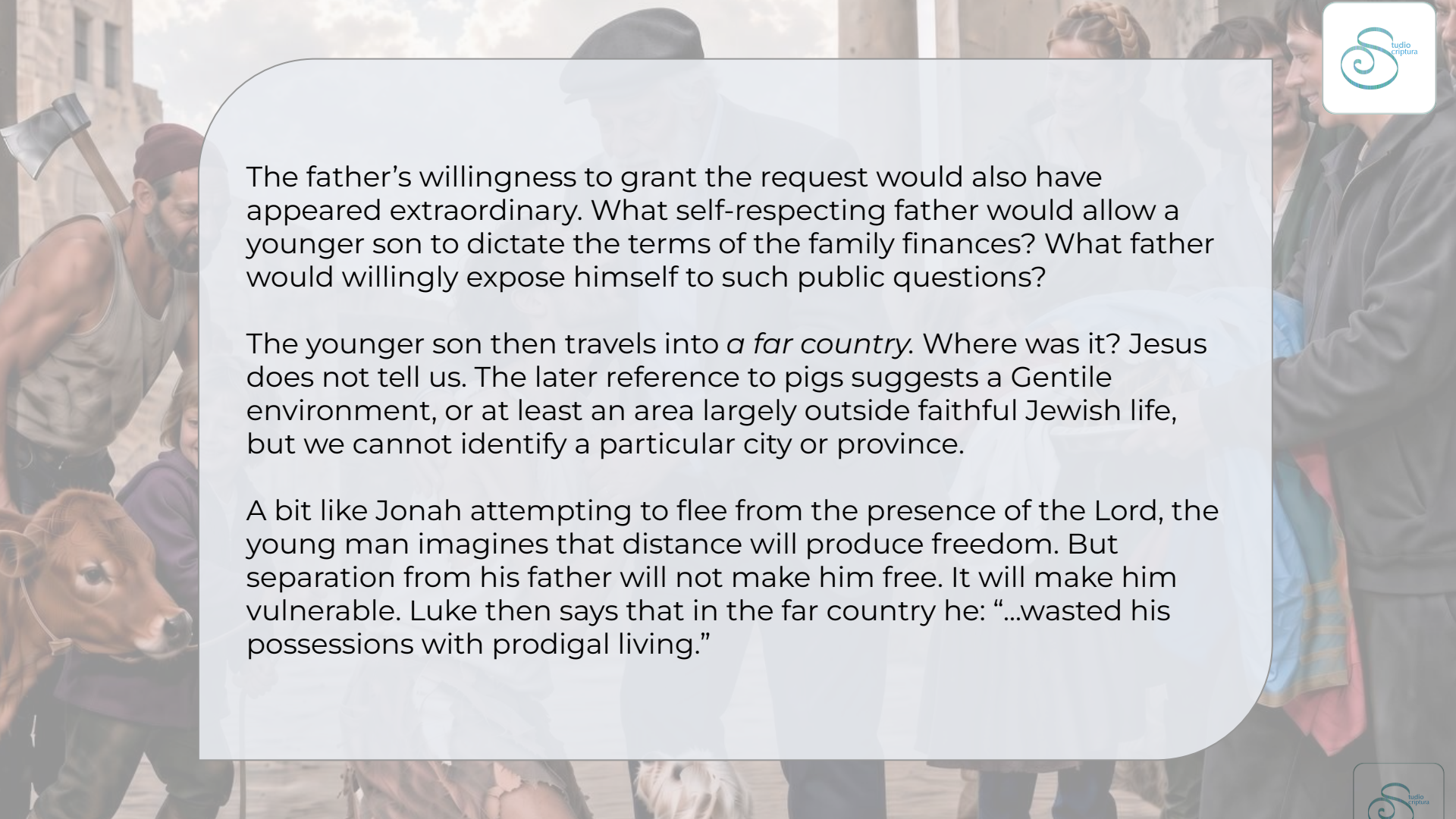
Sometimes one of the most frightening judgments God can give a sinner is to say, *You insist upon having it your way? Then go ahead and discover where it leads*.

“And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country.” This was apparently not spontaneous, the younger son was ready to leave. He had probably imagined this departure for some time. The property is transferred, sold, or converted into a form of exchange he can carry. The text does not describe the financial process, but his inheritance is quickly made portable.

He does not want to remain nearby where his father, older brother, relatives, or synagogue might cramp his style. He wants distance. He wants anonymity. He wants a place where nobody knows his father's name and nobody can cramp his style.

Today we would say he is expressing his authentic self!

In a society where family honor and public reputation carried enormous weight, his conduct would likely have brought shame upon the whole household. The community may well have known what happened. This was not merely a private lifestyle decision. His departure publicly communicated that he preferred separation from his father, family, and community.



The father's willingness to grant the request would also have appeared extraordinary. What self-respecting father would allow a younger son to dictate the terms of the family finances? What father would willingly expose himself to such public questions?

The younger son then travels into *a far country*. Where was it? Jesus does not tell us. The later reference to pigs suggests a Gentile environment, or at least an area largely outside faithful Jewish life, but we cannot identify a particular city or province.

A bit like Jonah attempting to flee from the presence of the Lord, the young man imagines that distance will produce freedom. But separation from his father will not make him free. It will make him vulnerable. Luke then says that in the far country he: "...wasted his possessions with prodigal living."

The word translated *wasted* means that he scattered or squandered his wealth. It is the image of throwing something into the wind. He spends the money as rapidly as he can. His life is undisciplined, extravagant, and wasteful. The money goes out with no thought. He has entered the season Hebrews 11:25 calls “the passing pleasures of sin.”

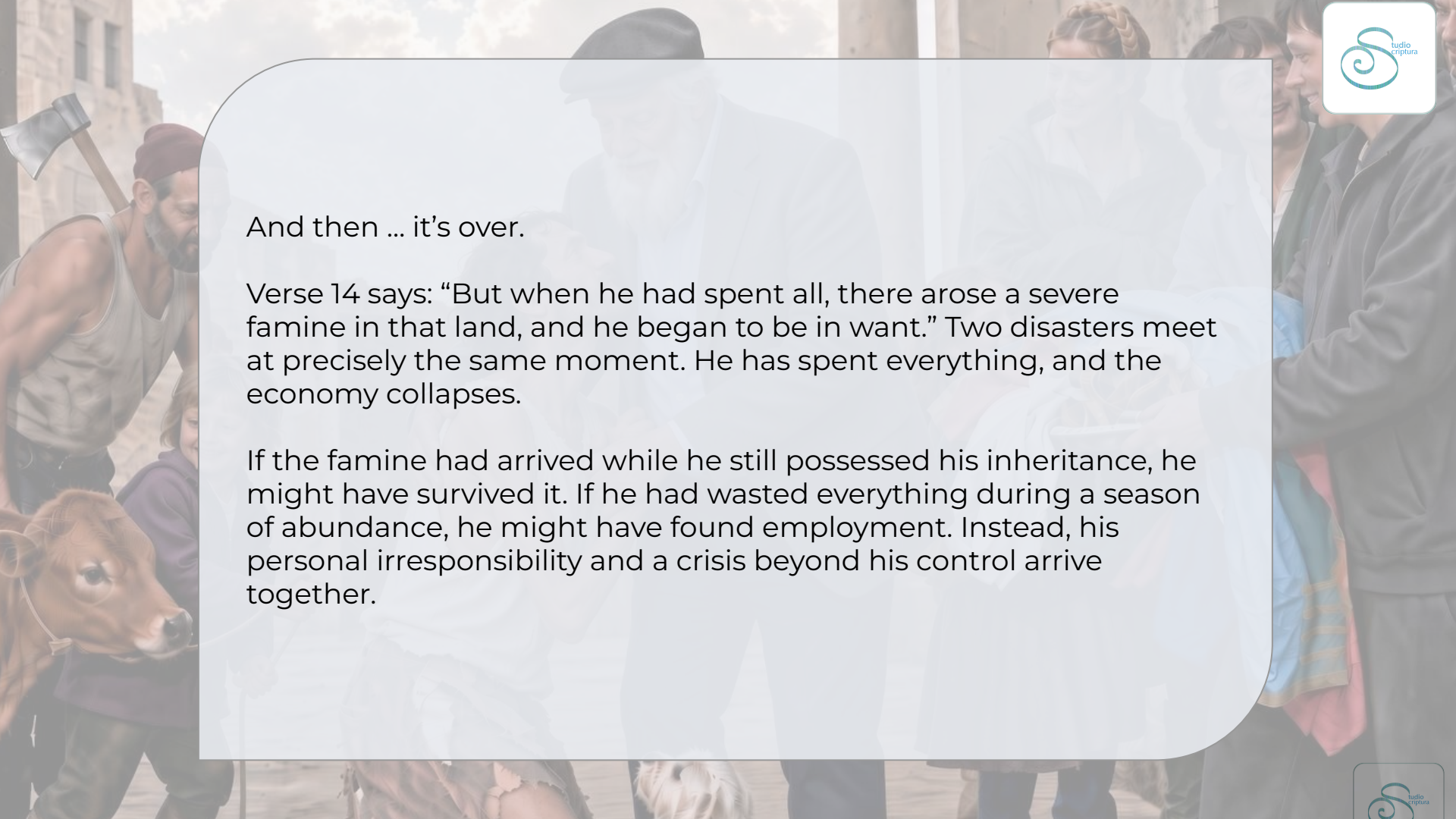
The Bible is honest about the fact that sin can bring pleasure. If sin offered no pleasure, temptation would be relatively simple to avoid. The problem is not that sin never feels good. The problem is that its pleasure passes while its consequences remain.

For a while, the young man is probably very popular. He is the rich man’s son in the bar. He pays for the meals. He pays for the entertainment. He is generous with money that he did not earn and therefore does not properly value.

Rudyard Kipling placed these words into his own version of the prodigal:

They talk of the money I spent out there,
They hint at the pace that I went out there,
Alone as a rich man's son.

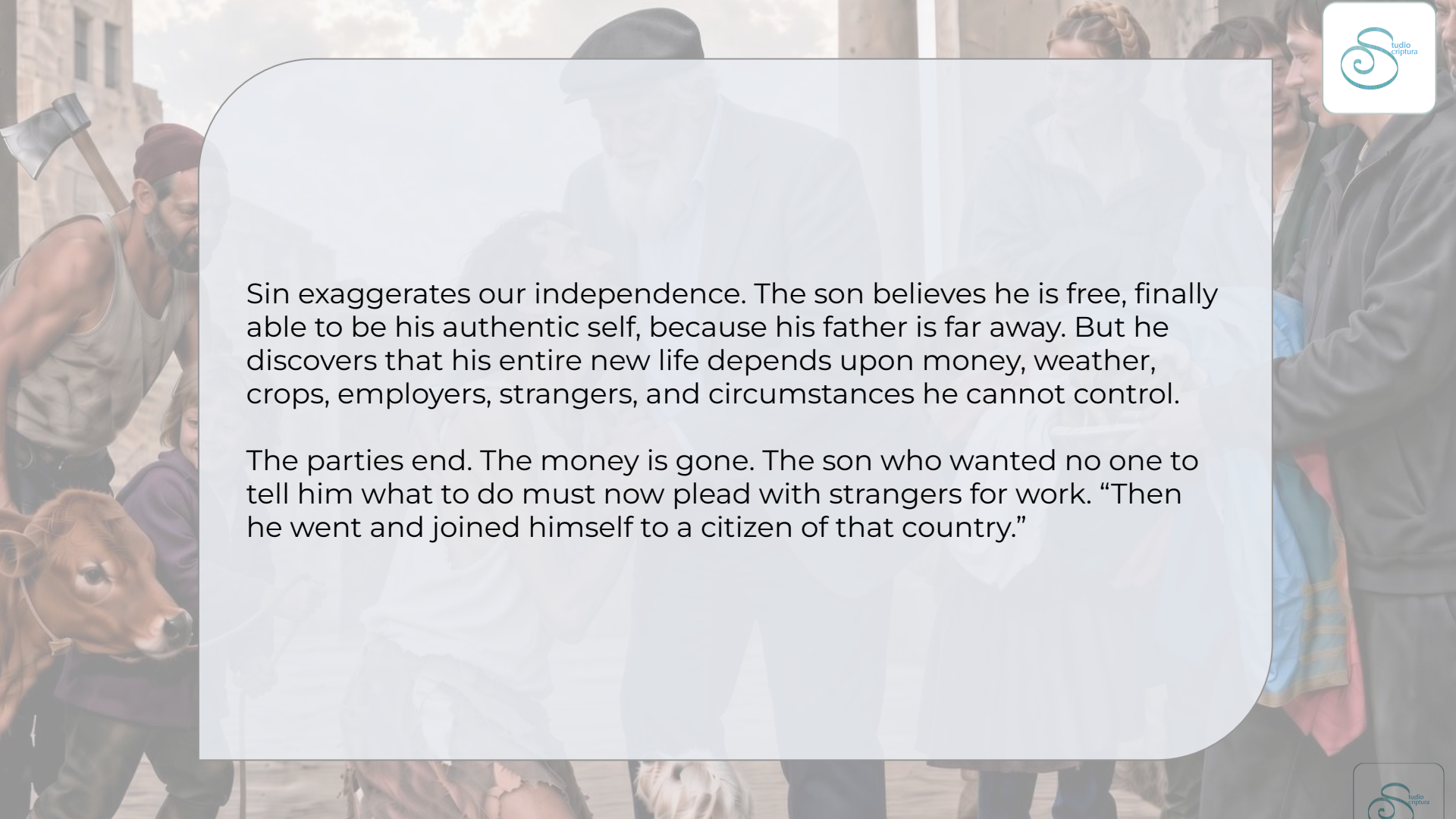
The older brother will later accuse him of devouring the property with harlots. That may be true, and Proverbs 29:3 warns that "a companion of harlots wastes his wealth." But we should notice that Jesus, as narrator, has not yet mentioned harlots. The text establishes reckless and immoral living without describing every form it took.



And then … it’s over.

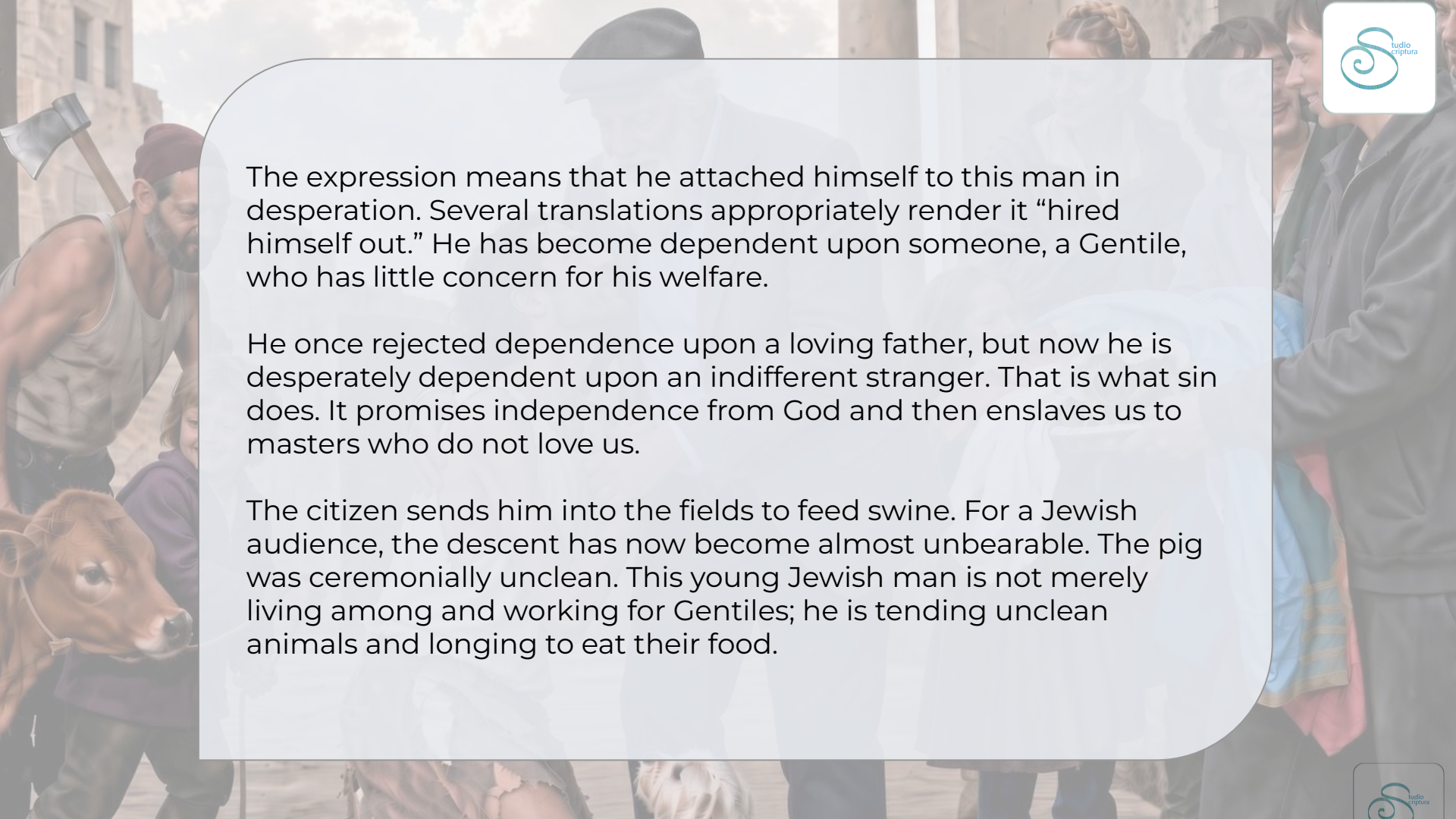
Verse 14 says: “But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.” Two disasters meet at precisely the same moment. He has spent everything, and the economy collapses.

If the famine had arrived while he still possessed his inheritance, he might have survived it. If he had wasted everything during a season of abundance, he might have found employment. Instead, his personal irresponsibility and a crisis beyond his control arrive together.



Sin exaggerates our independence. The son believes he is free, finally able to be his authentic self, because his father is far away. But he discovers that his entire new life depends upon money, weather, crops, employers, strangers, and circumstances he cannot control.

The parties end. The money is gone. The son who wanted no one to tell him what to do must now plead with strangers for work. “Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country.”



The expression means that he attached himself to this man in desperation. Several translations appropriately render it “hired himself out.” He has become dependent upon someone, a Gentile, who has little concern for his welfare.

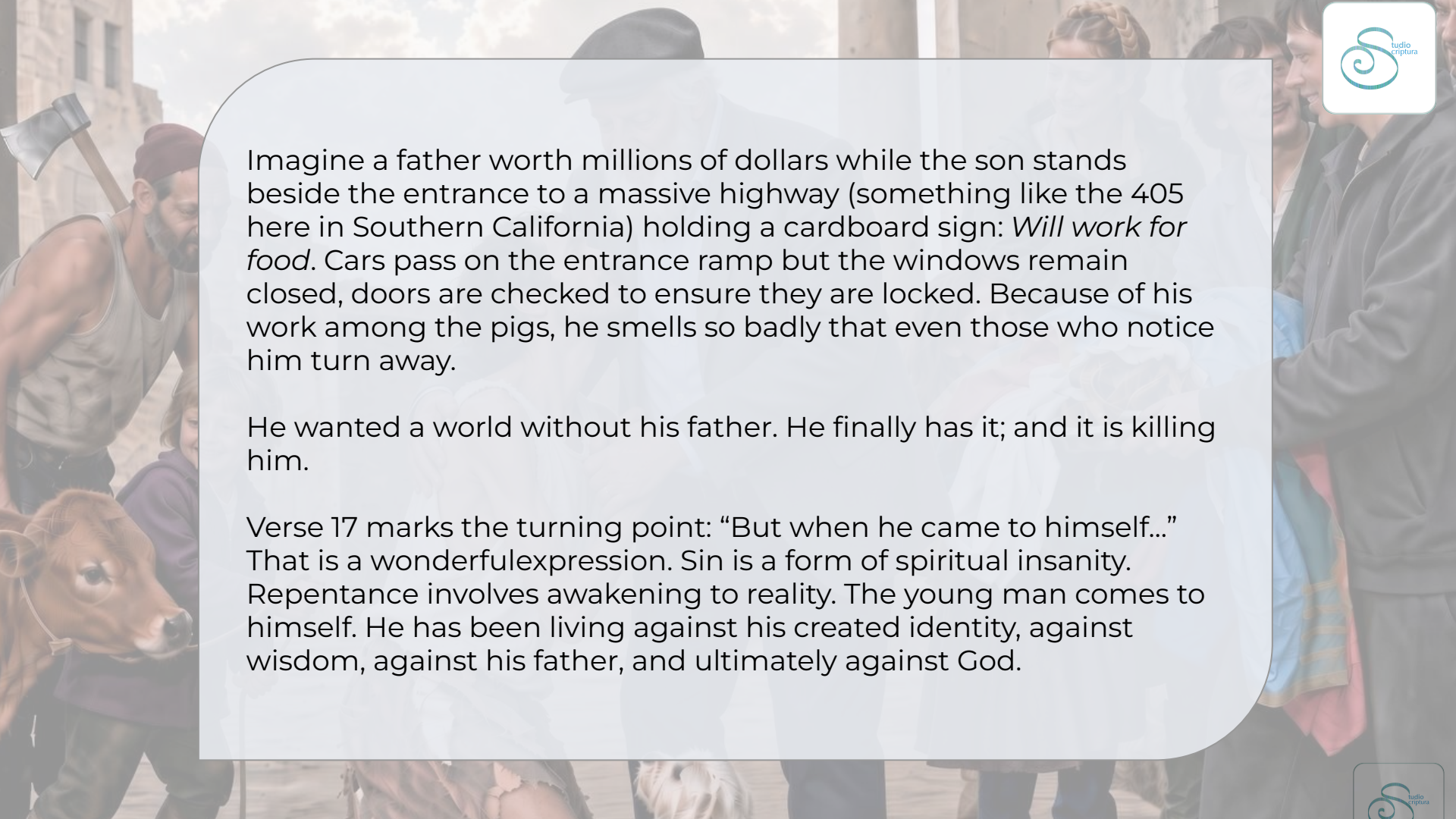
He once rejected dependence upon a loving father, but now he is desperately dependent upon an indifferent stranger. That is what sin does. It promises independence from God and then enslaves us to masters who do not love us.

The citizen sends him into the fields to feed swine. For a Jewish audience, the descent has now become almost unbearable. The pig was ceremonially unclean. This young Jewish man is not merely living among and working for Gentiles; he is tending unclean animals and longing to eat their food.

The pods are generally identified as carob pods, the fruit of a tree common throughout the Mediterranean world. The pods were used as animal feed and, in severe poverty or famine, could also be eaten by people. The point is not necessarily that they were completely inedible. The point is that the pigs are eating while he remains hungry. He has nothing.

Everything in the description is intended to make Jesus' Jewish listeners recoil. Jesus is taking the younger son as low as His audience can imagine. This is an unbearable level of humiliation.

And the scene ends with a devastating sentence: "And no one gave him anything."



Imagine a father worth millions of dollars while the son stands beside the entrance to a massive highway (something like the 405 here in Southern California) holding a cardboard sign: *Will work for food*. Cars pass on the entrance ramp but the windows remain closed, doors are checked to ensure they are locked. Because of his work among the pigs, he smells so badly that even those who notice him turn away.

He wanted a world without his father. He finally has it; and it is killing him.

Verse 17 marks the turning point: “But when he came to himself…” That is a wonderfulexpression. Sin is a form of spiritual insanity. Repentance involves awakening to reality. The young man comes to himself. He has been living against his created identity, against wisdom, against his father, and ultimately against God.

He begins to think clearly: “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!” The memory that begins his return is the goodness of his father. Even the hired workers have enough. The father is not cruel. The household is not oppressive. The servants are not starving. The young man remembers abundance while sitting in destitution.

His initial motivation is not entirely noble. He is hungry. He does not offer a polished theological definition of repentance. He knows that he is dying and that there is bread in his father’s house.

Repentance may begin with mixed motives. A man may first cry out to God because his life is collapsing. Some may return to church because they are frightened of life. A sinner may begin to pray because the far country has finally become unbearable.

We should not despise the beginning of repentance merely because the sinner cannot yet describe everything with perfect doctrine. The important point is that the young man does not merely feel bad. He turns, he decides to make a change in direction: “I will arise and go to my father … And he arose and came to his father.”

Biblical repentance is not mere regret. Regret says, “I hate what my choices have done to me.” Repentance says, “I have sinned, and I must turn back to the Father.” Regret sits in anger among the pigs indefinitely. Repentance gets up and starts home.

So the son rehearses his confession: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.” To sin “against heaven” is a reverent Jewish way of acknowledging sin against God. He now recognizes that his offense has been more than horizontal. He has not merely wasted his father’s property and damaged the family’s reputation. His rebellion against his earthly father was ultimately sin against God.

David expresses this vertical dimension of sin in Psalm 51:4: “Against You, You only, have I sinned, And done this evil in Your sight.”

He does not blame the famine. He doesn't blame his friends. He does not blame his father, his brother, his upbringing, or a failure of society. He says, “I have sinned.” That is confession. Genuine repentance does not hide behind a passive phrase, “Some bad decisions and mistakes were made.” It says, “I sinned.”

He continues: “And I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” He knows that he cannot stroll back into the household and act as though nothing happened. He has publicly rejected his father. He has consumed his portion. He has no remaining financial claim.

It seems he imagines that he can return, work for wages, and gradually repay at least part of what he has lost. Maybe he can work his way back into his father's good graces.

That is how the human heart naturally thinks about reconciliation with God. Perhaps if I suffer long enough, serve hard enough, become religious enough, and prove myself sincere enough, then God will reconsider my case.

Jesus then turns our attention from the returning son to the father: "But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion." We often say that the father must have stood beside the road every day looking for his son. That is possible, but the text does not tell us his daily routine. What it does tell us is sufficient.

The father sees the son while the son is still far away. He recognizes him. He does not turn his back. He does not order the servants to close the gate. He does not say, “Let him remain there until I determine whether he has suffered enough.”

The father has compassion, and his response arises from his own character before the son can say anything. The father runs to him.

A mature and respected landowner running publicly would likely have appeared conspicuous and undignified. In an honor-and-shame culture, people lived with an acute awareness of how their actions reflected upon the family, their seniority, and how the community would judge them.

We cannot reconstruct every supposed village custom with certainty. But the movement of the parable is unmistakable. The father does not preserve his dignity at the expense of his son. He does not walk slowly and require the young man to complete a long, humiliating approach before the entire community. He runs toward him.

The son left the father, but when the son turns homeward, it is the father who closes the distance. He falls upon his neck and kisses him. The young man reeks like swine and the hunger, travel, sweat, poverty are all obvious. Yet the father embraces him. He kisses him before the son can say anything.

He receives the repentant son, not because the son has made himself presentable, but because the father is “abundant in mercy” (Psalm 86:5). This is not cheap grace. The son truly returns. He truly repents. He does not demand his rights. He does not excuse his sin. But neither does he earn the embrace. The father’s grace meets him before he can bargain.

God receives the repentant. He does not receive the person determined to remain in rebellion while asking only for relief from its consequences. The sinner’s hope is not that he has accumulated sufficient works. His hope is that “the LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy” (Psalm 103:8).

The son then begins the speech he has rehearsed: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But notice what he does not say. He never reaches the final proposal: “Make me like one of your hired servants.”

The father begins issuing instructions. The son has confessed his sin and unworthiness, but the father does not negotiate a probationary employment agreement. He tells the servants, “Bring out the best robe and put it on him.” Not merely a spare robe, the best robe.

This is a public act of restoration. The household must see it, and the community will see it. The father is not quietly permitting the young man to slip back into the household until he proves himself. He is openly identifying him as someone who belongs there. The son returned wearing the visible evidence of his degradation; the father now covers him with the visible evidence of his acceptance.

Clothing and covering carry rich significance throughout Scripture. After the fall, “the LORD God made tunics of skin” for Adam and Eve and clothed them (Genesis 3:21). Later, Paul describes those united to Christ as having “put on Christ”: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26–27).

The robe in this parable should not be pressed into a precise allegorical symbol of justification, but it does beautifully echo this wider biblical pattern: God covers the shame of those He receives and grants them a standing within His fellowship that they could never achieve for themselves.

The prodigal does not make himself presentable before the father receives him. He is clothed by the father as part of his restoration. In the same way, we do not stand before God dressed in a righteousness of our own making.

Our acceptance rests entirely in Jesus Christ.

The father continues: “Put a ring on his hand.” The ring is another mark of dignity and recognized status. It may suggest household authority, particularly if it was a signet ring. But the point is clear enough; the father does not receive him as disposable labor. He receives him with honor as a restored member of the family.

And he says: “And sandals on his feet.” The son is not left barefoot in humiliation. The robe, ring, and sandals together communicate full and public restoration. The father does not say, “We will see whether you are sincere. Work in the field for six months, and then perhaps we will discuss your future.” He does not make the son earn his way back into sonship. He restores him.

Then the father calls for the fatted calf: “Bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry.” A fatted calf was not ordinary food. It was prepared for a significant communal celebration and could feed a large gathering.

The shepherd called friends and neighbors to celebrate the recovered sheep. The woman called friends and neighbors to celebrate the recovered coin. Now the father opens his house and calls the community to celebrate his recovered son. The restoration is not hidden.

The father explains why: “For this my son was *dead* and is alive again; he was *lost* and is found.” The father does not minimize what happened. He does not say, “Boys will be boys.” He does not describe the rebellion as a harmless journey of living one’s authentic life. He calls it *death*. He calls it *lostness*.

Given the severity of the son’s rejection, no one in the audience would have been surprised if the father had disowned him permanently and regarded the relationship as dead. Instead, the father announces that the son who was dead is alive again.

Within the story, *dead* describes the son's complete alienation from his father and family. Yet the language also resonates powerfully with the New Testament description of sinners as dead in trespasses and made alive by God in Christ. Ephesians 2:1 describes our natural spiritual condition: "And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins."

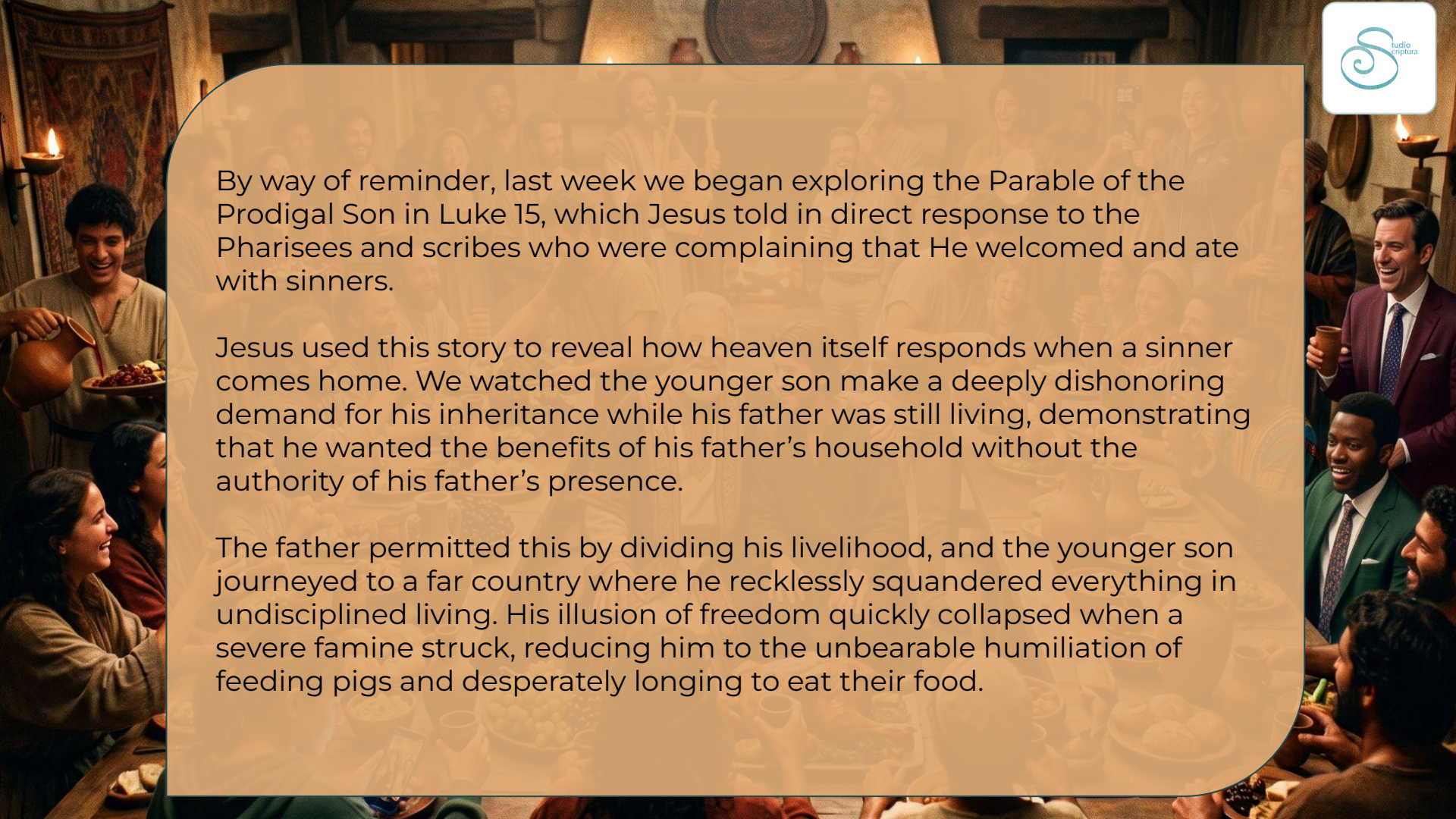
A spiritually dead person cannot resurrect himself. The new birth is the work of God. God gives life, and the sinner responds in faith and repentance. We are not saved by the eloquence of our confession, the amount of suffering we endured in the far country, or our religious activities.

The prodigal does not work his way back into sonship. He comes home confessing that he has no claim upon it. The father restores him by grace, but this grace is not an endorsement of the far country. Grace does not tell sinners that rebellion is harmless. Grace brings sinners out of rebellion.

The Christian Gospel is not, “No matter how badly you behave, God does not care.” The gospel is that no matter how far you have fallen, there is hope for the repentant sinner who comes to God through Jesus Christ.

The father calls for the celebration, and: “They began to be merry.” The lost son has been found. But Jesus has not finished the story.

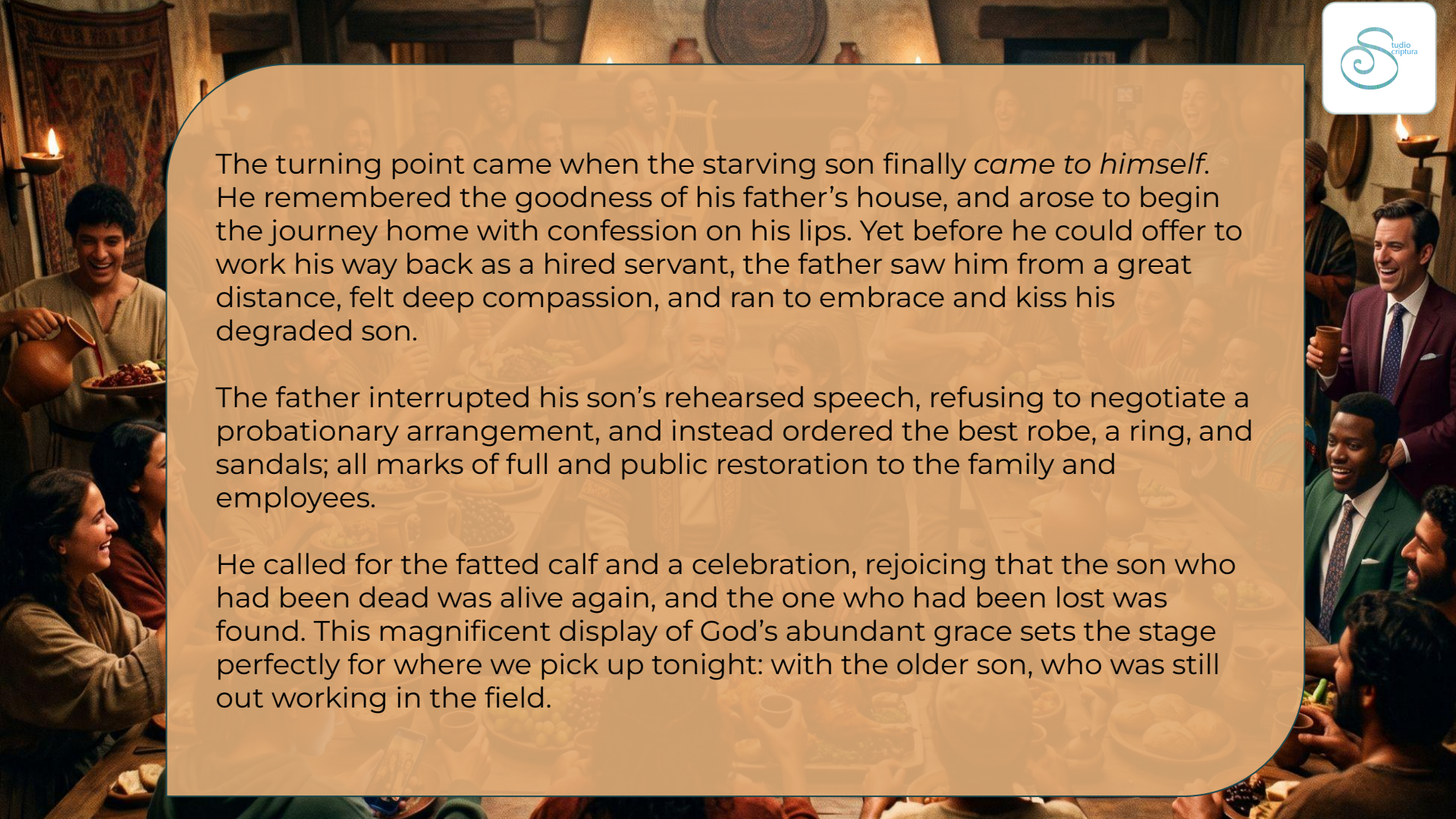
“Now his older son was in the field.” (Luke 15:25)



By way of reminder, last week we began exploring the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, which Jesus told in direct response to the Pharisees and scribes who were complaining that He welcomed and ate with sinners.

Jesus used this story to reveal how heaven itself responds when a sinner comes home. We watched the younger son make a deeply dishonoring demand for his inheritance while his father was still living, demonstrating that he wanted the benefits of his father's household without the authority of his father's presence.

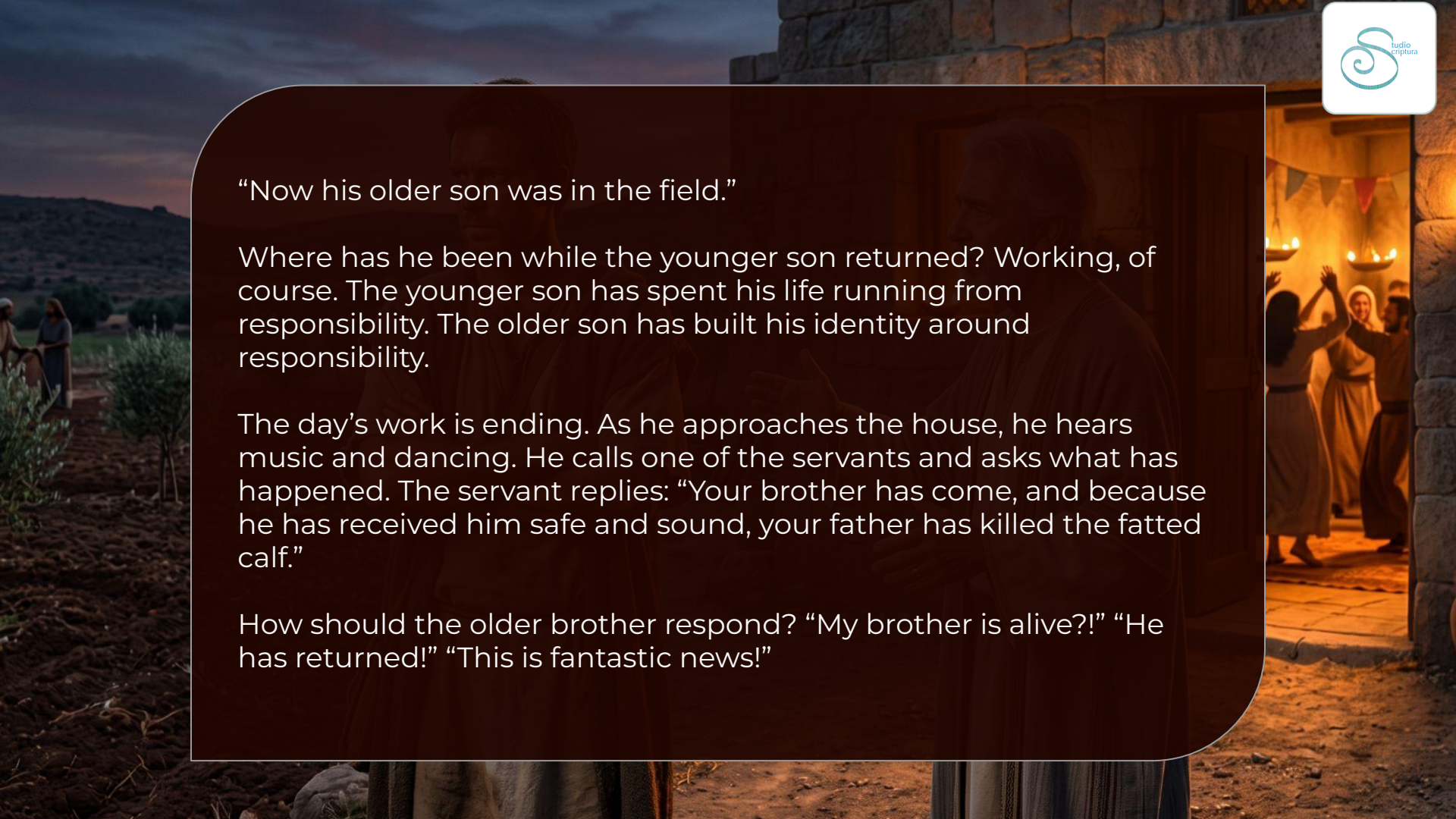
The father permitted this by dividing his livelihood, and the younger son journeyed to a far country where he recklessly squandered everything in undisciplined living. His illusion of freedom quickly collapsed when a severe famine struck, reducing him to the unbearable humiliation of feeding pigs and desperately longing to eat their food.



The turning point came when the starving son finally *came to himself*. He remembered the goodness of his father's house, and arose to begin the journey home with confession on his lips. Yet before he could offer to work his way back as a hired servant, the father saw him from a great distance, felt deep compassion, and ran to embrace and kiss his degraded son.

The father interrupted his son's rehearsed speech, refusing to negotiate a probationary arrangement, and instead ordered the best robe, a ring, and sandals; all marks of full and public restoration to the family and employees.

He called for the fatted calf and a celebration, rejoicing that the son who had been dead was alive again, and the one who had been lost was found. This magnificent display of God's abundant grace sets the stage perfectly for where we pick up tonight: with the older son, who was still out working in the field.

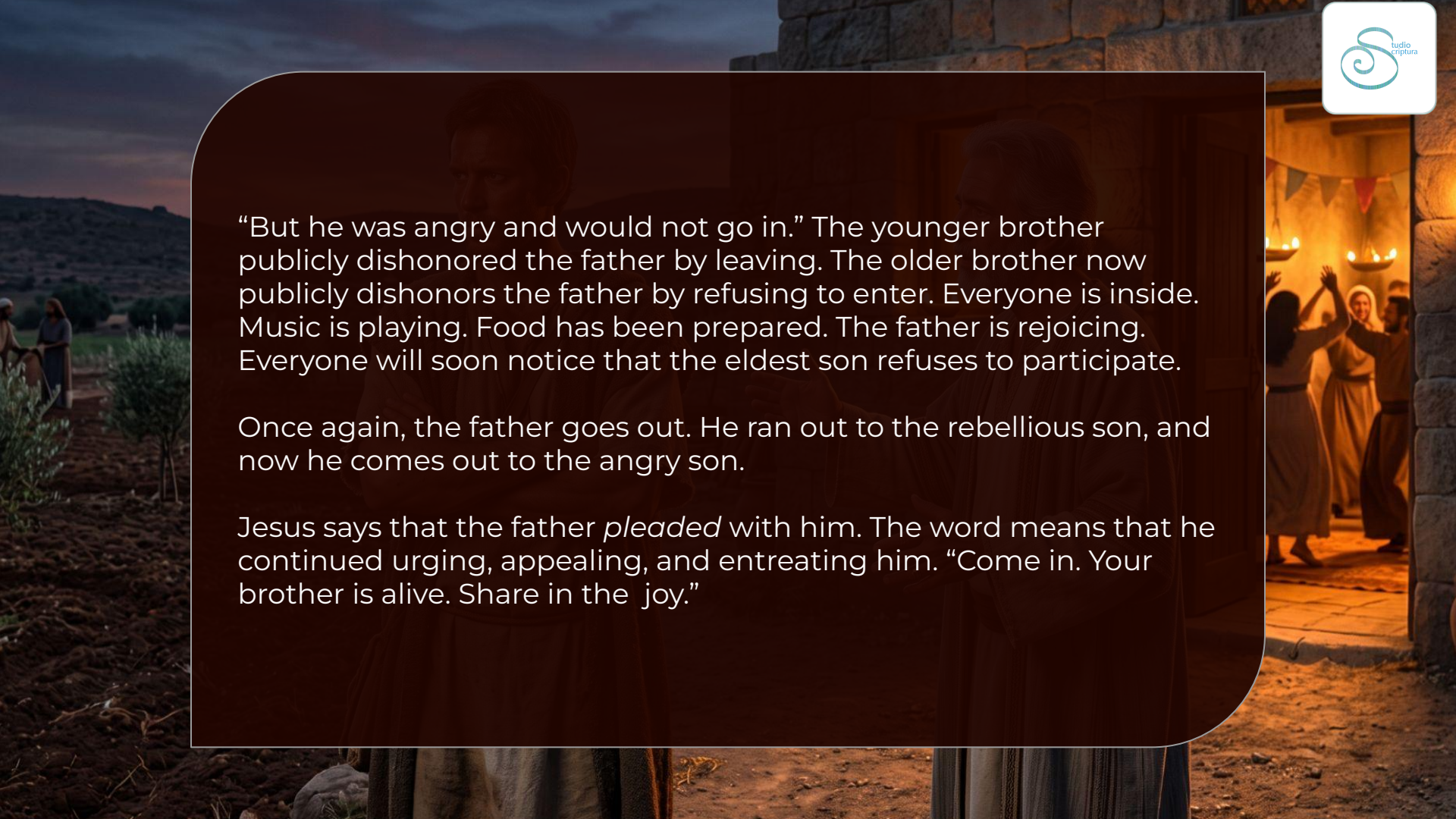


“Now his older son was in the field.”

Where has he been while the younger son returned? Working, of course. The younger son has spent his life running from responsibility. The older son has built his identity around responsibility.

The day’s work is ending. As he approaches the house, he hears music and dancing. He calls one of the servants and asks what has happened. The servant replies: “Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.”

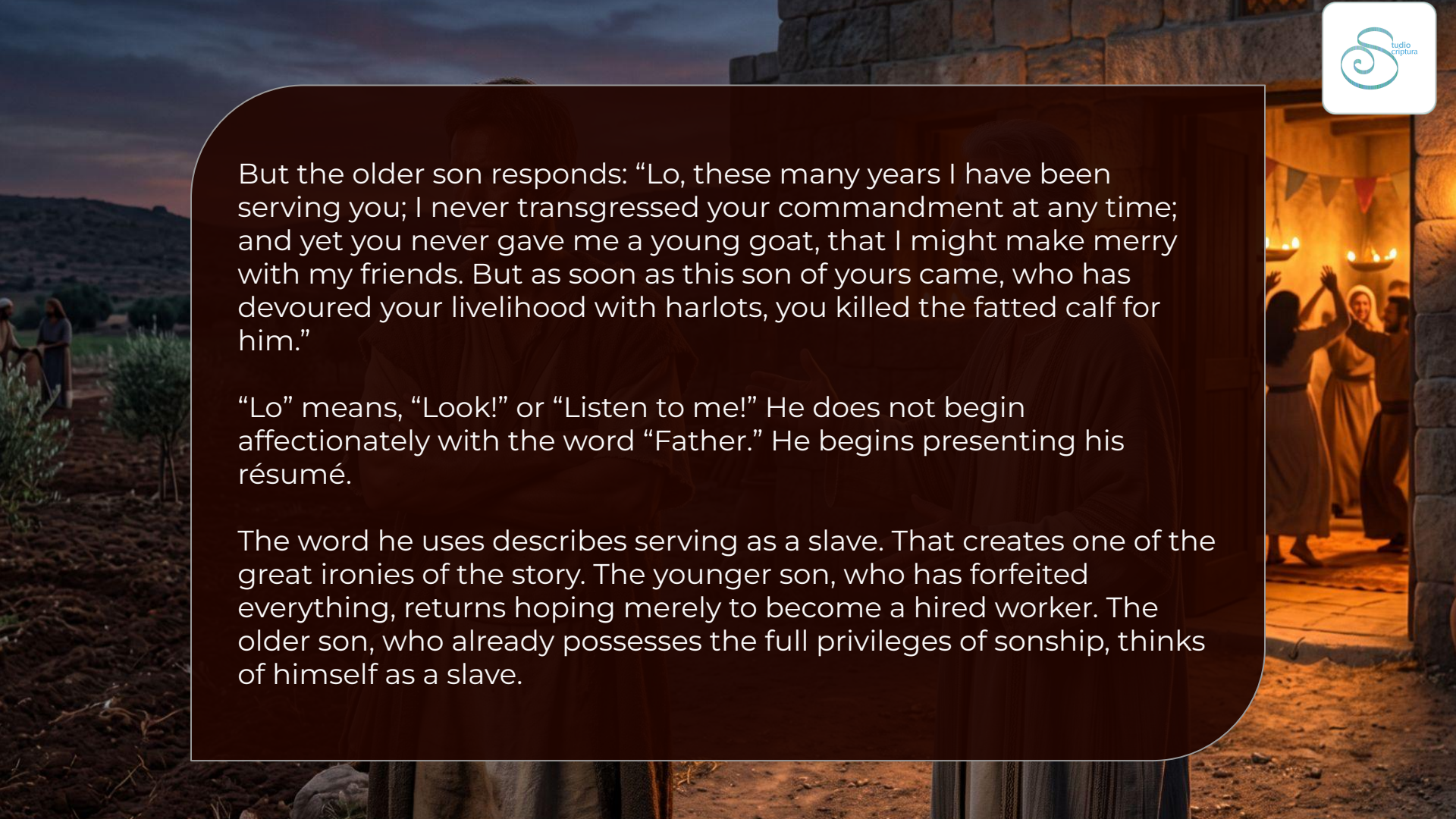
How should the older brother respond? “My brother is alive?!” “He has returned!” “This is fantastic news!”



“But he was angry and would not go in.” The younger brother publicly dishonored the father by leaving. The older brother now publicly dishonors the father by refusing to enter. Everyone is inside. Music is playing. Food has been prepared. The father is rejoicing. Everyone will soon notice that the eldest son refuses to participate.

Once again, the father goes out. He ran out to the rebellious son, and now he comes out to the angry son.

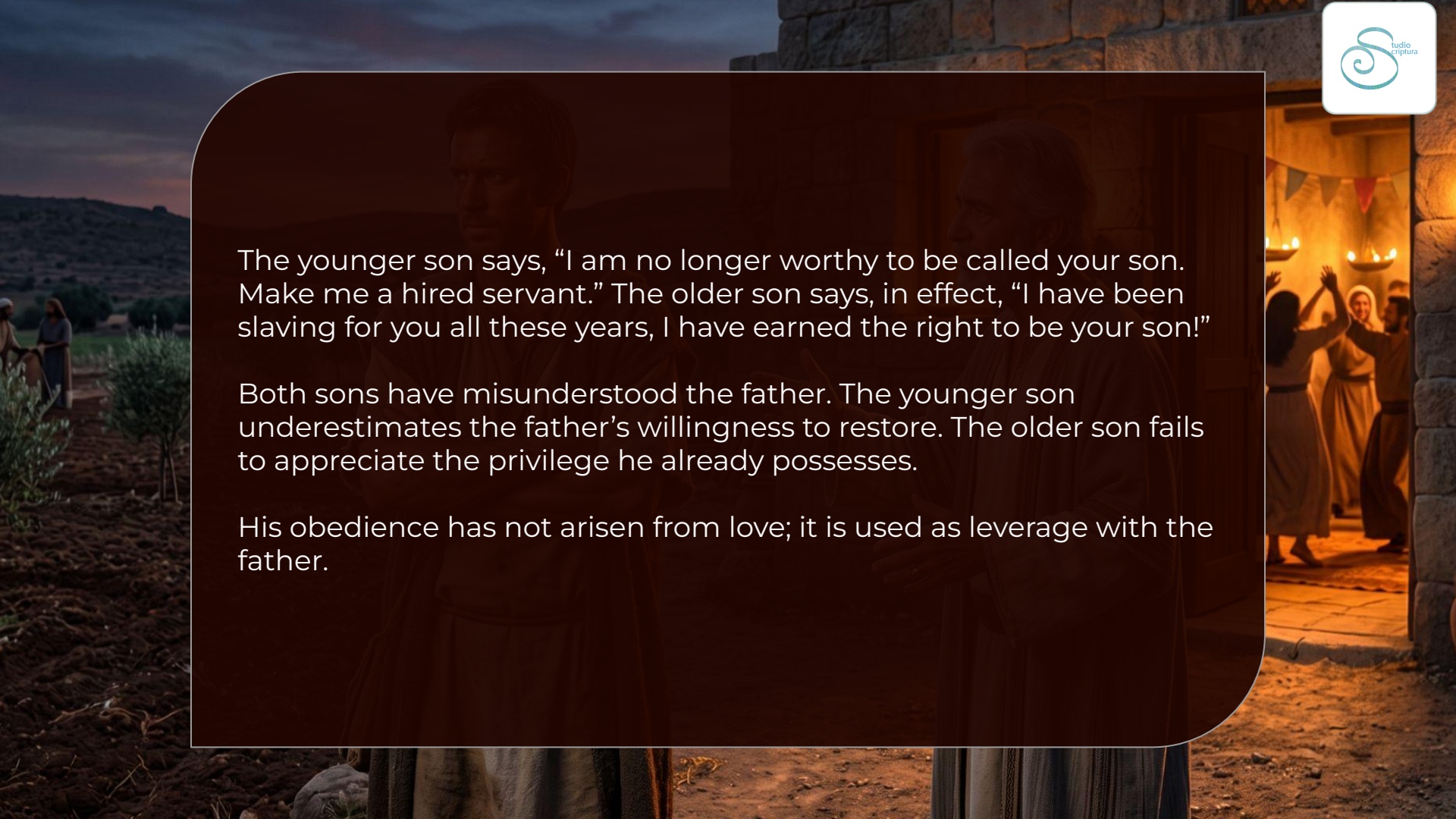
Jesus says that the father *pleaded* with him. The word means that he continued urging, appealing, and entreating him. “Come in. Your brother is alive. Share in the joy.”



But the older son responds: “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. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.”

“Lo” means, “Look!” or “Listen to me!” He does not begin affectionately with the word “Father.” He begins presenting his résumé.

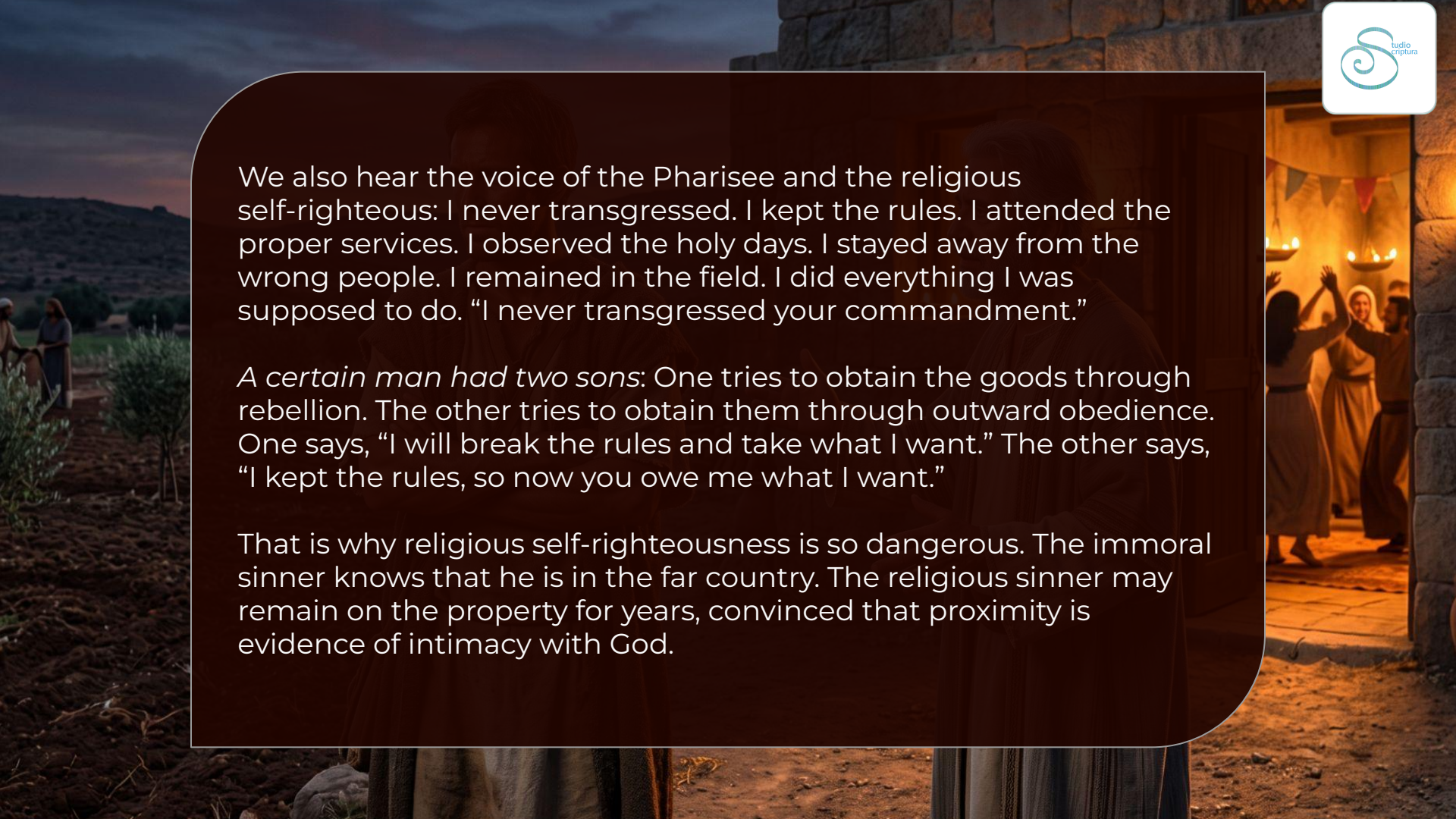
The word he uses describes serving as a slave. That creates one of the great ironies of the story. The younger son, who has forfeited everything, returns hoping merely to become a hired worker. The older son, who already possesses the full privileges of sonship, thinks of himself as a slave.



The younger son says, “I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me a hired servant.” The older son says, in effect, “I have been slaving for you all these years, I have earned the right to be your son!”

Both sons have misunderstood the father. The younger son underestimates the father’s willingness to restore. The older son fails to appreciate the privilege he already possesses.

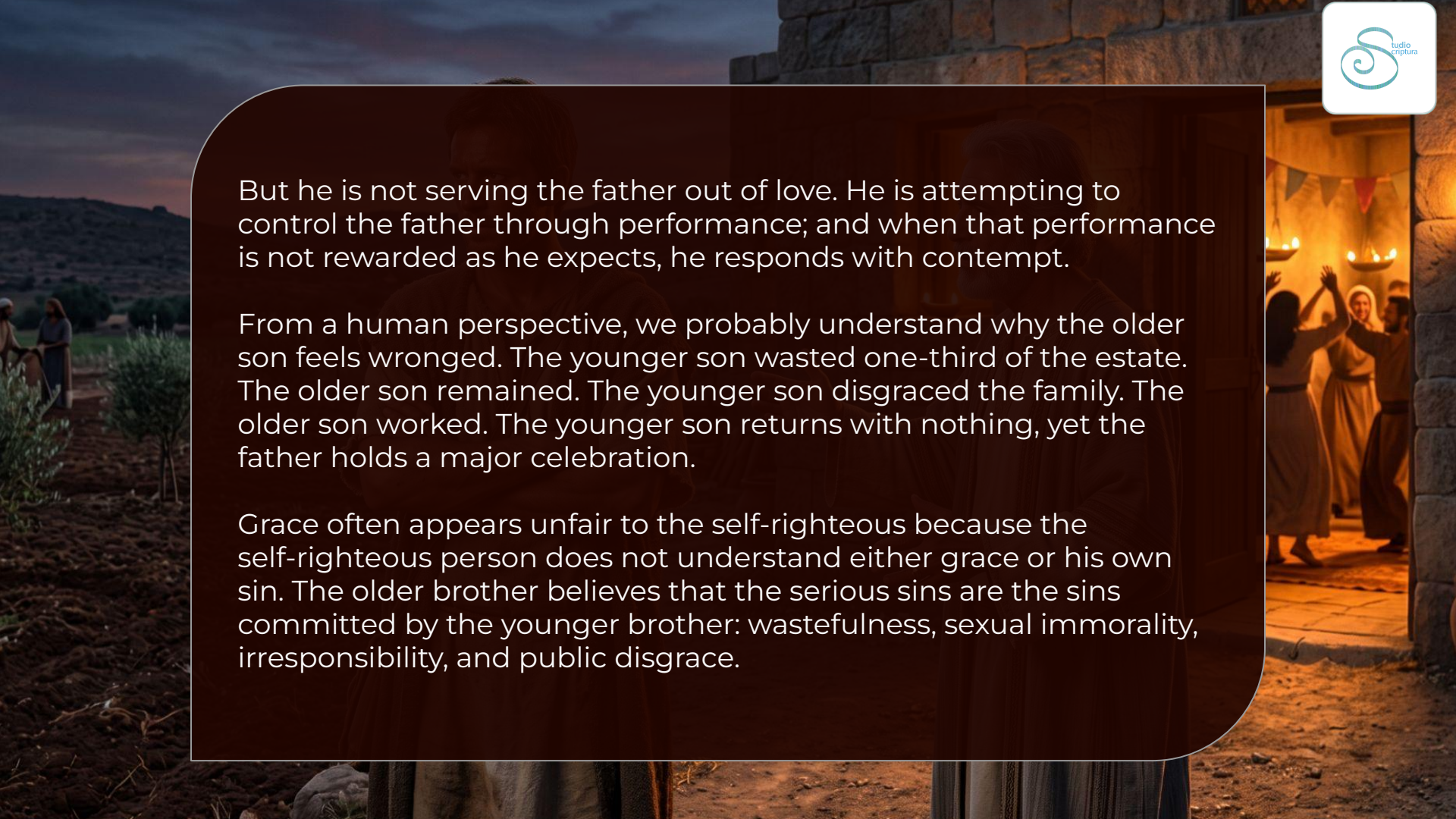
His obedience has not arisen from love; it is used as leverage with the father.



We also hear the voice of the Pharisee and the religious self-righteous: I never transgressed. I kept the rules. I attended the proper services. I observed the holy days. I stayed away from the wrong people. I remained in the field. I did everything I was supposed to do. “I never transgressed your commandment.”

A certain man had two sons: One tries to obtain the goods through rebellion. The other tries to obtain them through outward obedience. One says, “I will break the rules and take what I want.” The other says, “I kept the rules, so now you owe me what I want.”

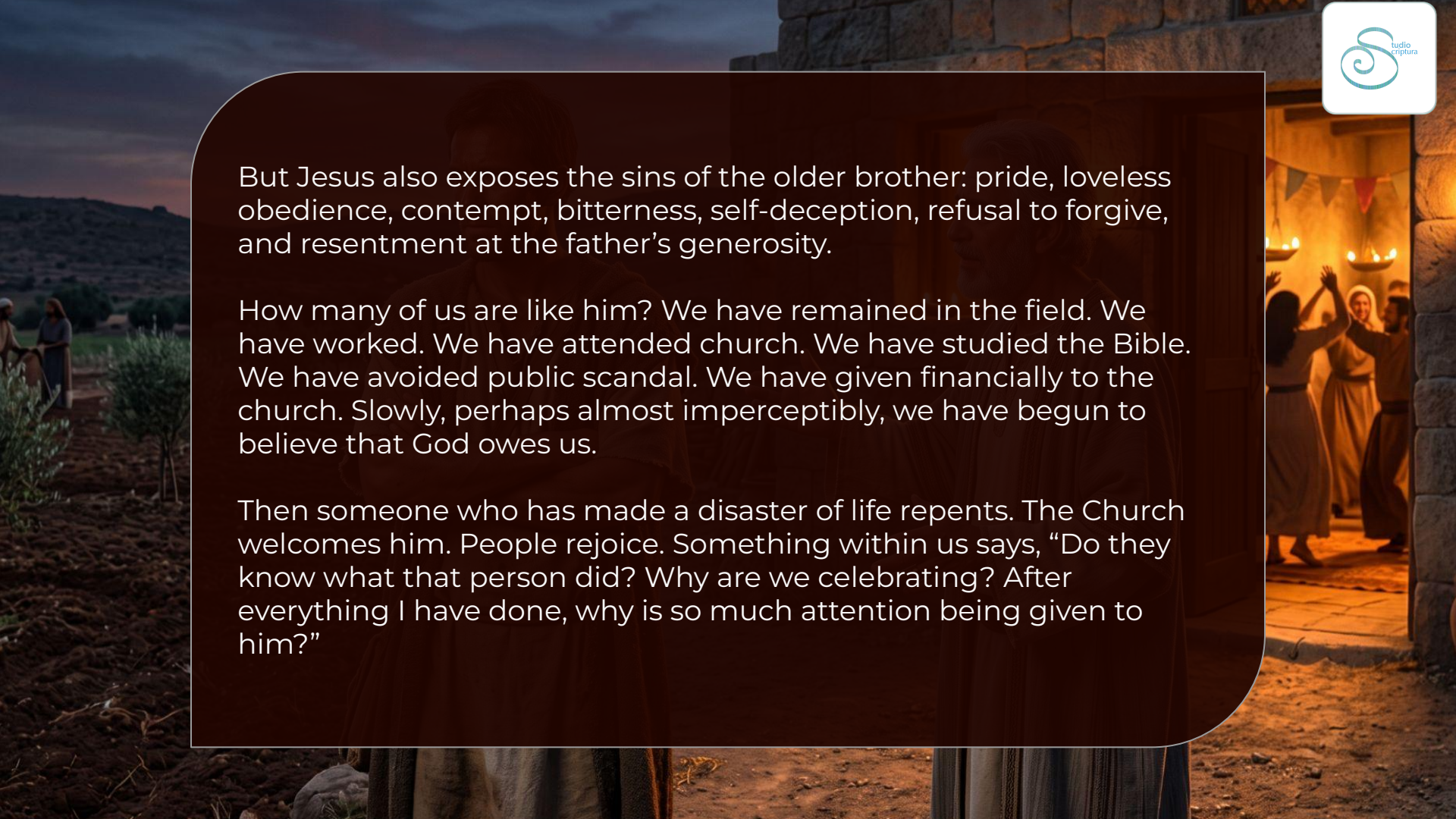
That is why religious self-righteousness is so dangerous. The immoral sinner knows that he is in the far country. The religious sinner may remain on the property for years, convinced that proximity is evidence of intimacy with God.



But he is not serving the father out of love. He is attempting to control the father through performance; and when that performance is not rewarded as he expects, he responds with contempt.

From a human perspective, we probably understand why the older son feels wronged. The younger son wasted one-third of the estate. The older son remained. The younger son disgraced the family. The older son worked. The younger son returns with nothing, yet the father holds a major celebration.

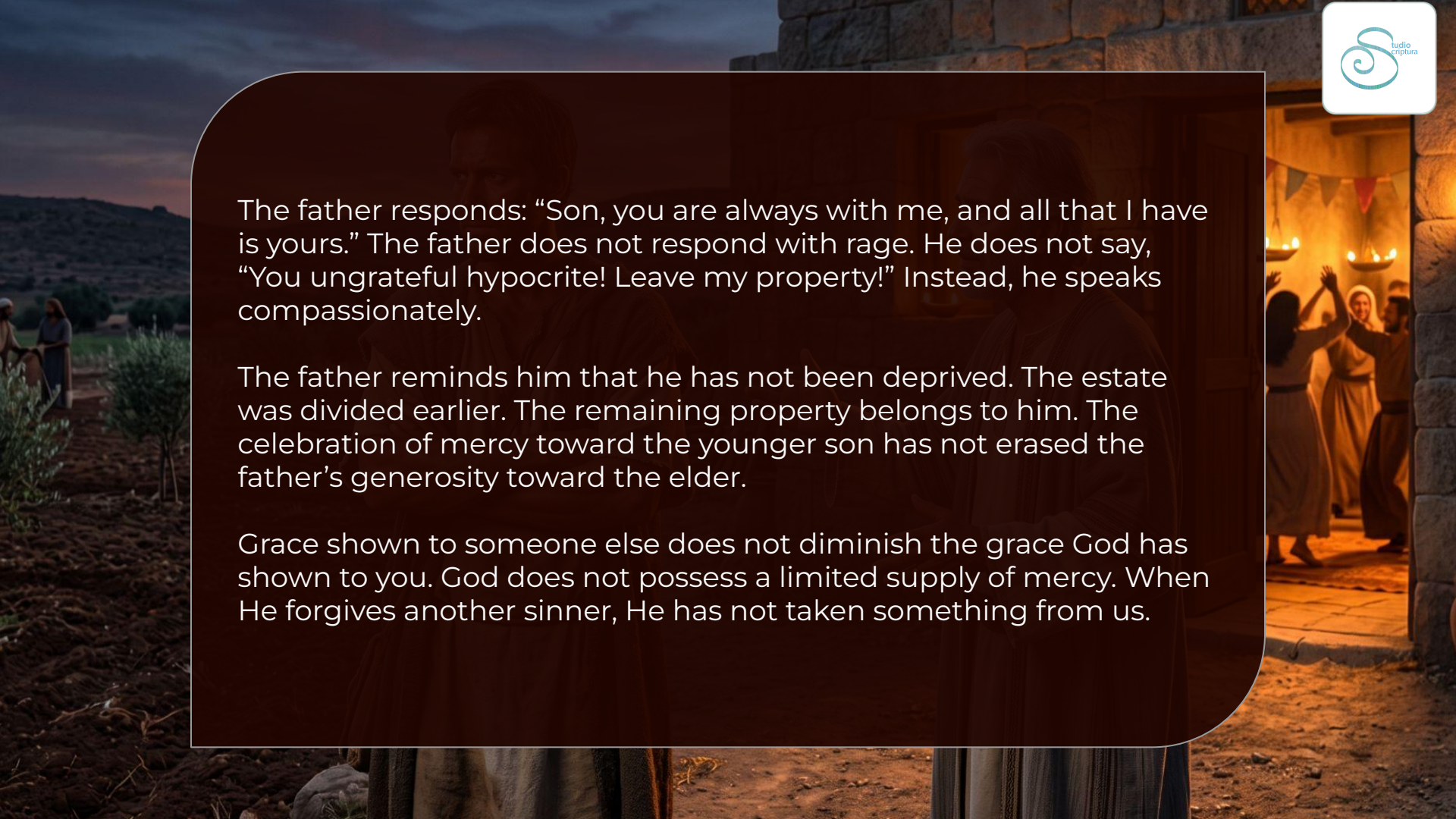
Grace often appears unfair to the self-righteous because the self-righteous person does not understand either grace or his own sin. The older brother believes that the serious sins are the sins committed by the younger brother: wastefulness, sexual immorality, irresponsibility, and public disgrace.



But Jesus also exposes the sins of the older brother: pride, loveless obedience, contempt, bitterness, self-deception, refusal to forgive, and resentment at the father's generosity.

How many of us are like him? We have remained in the field. We have worked. We have attended church. We have studied the Bible. We have avoided public scandal. We have given financially to the church. Slowly, perhaps almost imperceptibly, we have begun to believe that God owes us.

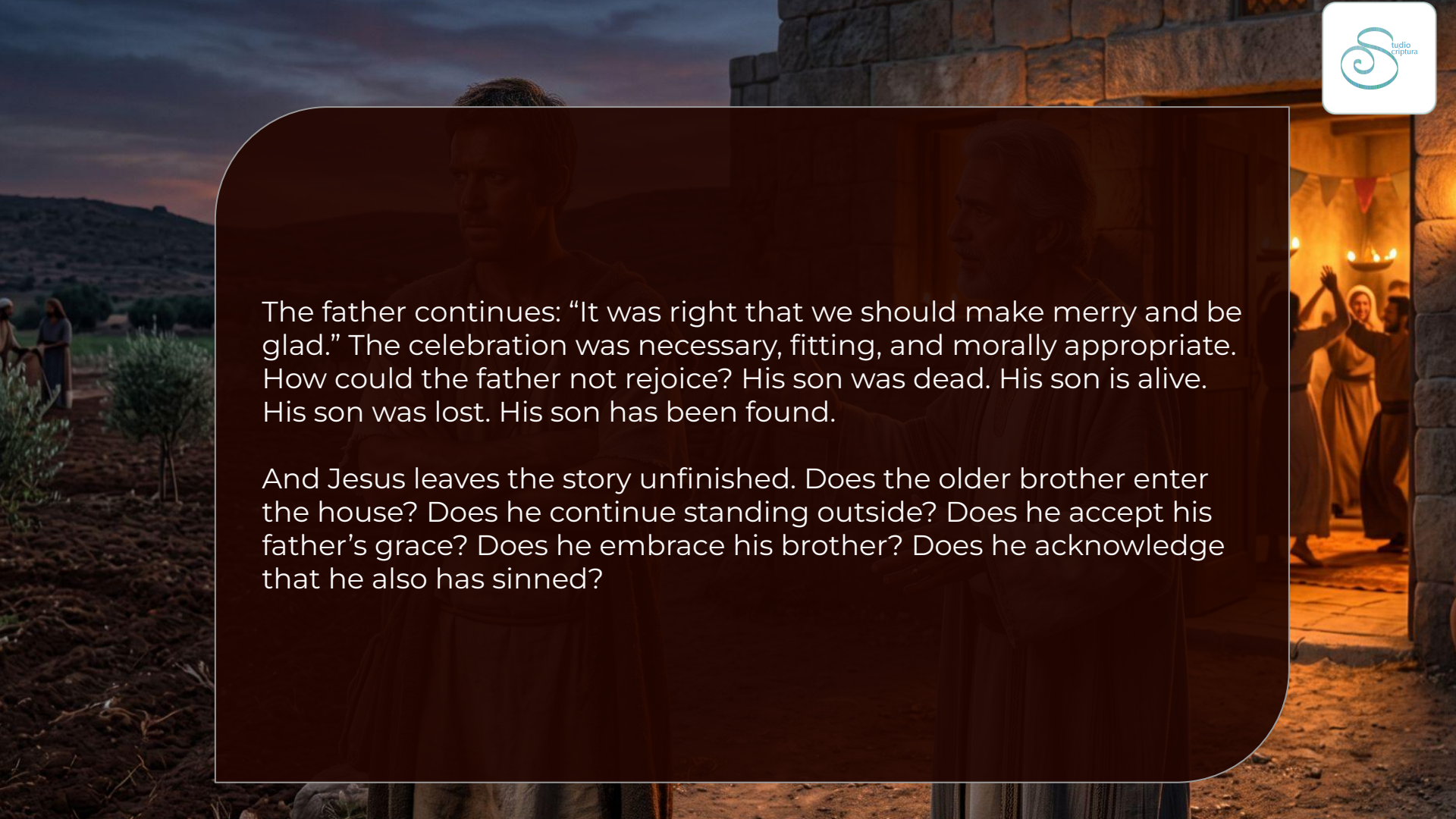
Then someone who has made a disaster of life repents. The Church welcomes him. People rejoice. Something within us says, "Do they know what that person did? Why are we celebrating? After everything I have done, why is so much attention being given to him?"



The father responds: “Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.” The father does not respond with rage. He does not say, “You ungrateful hypocrite! Leave my property!” Instead, he speaks compassionately.

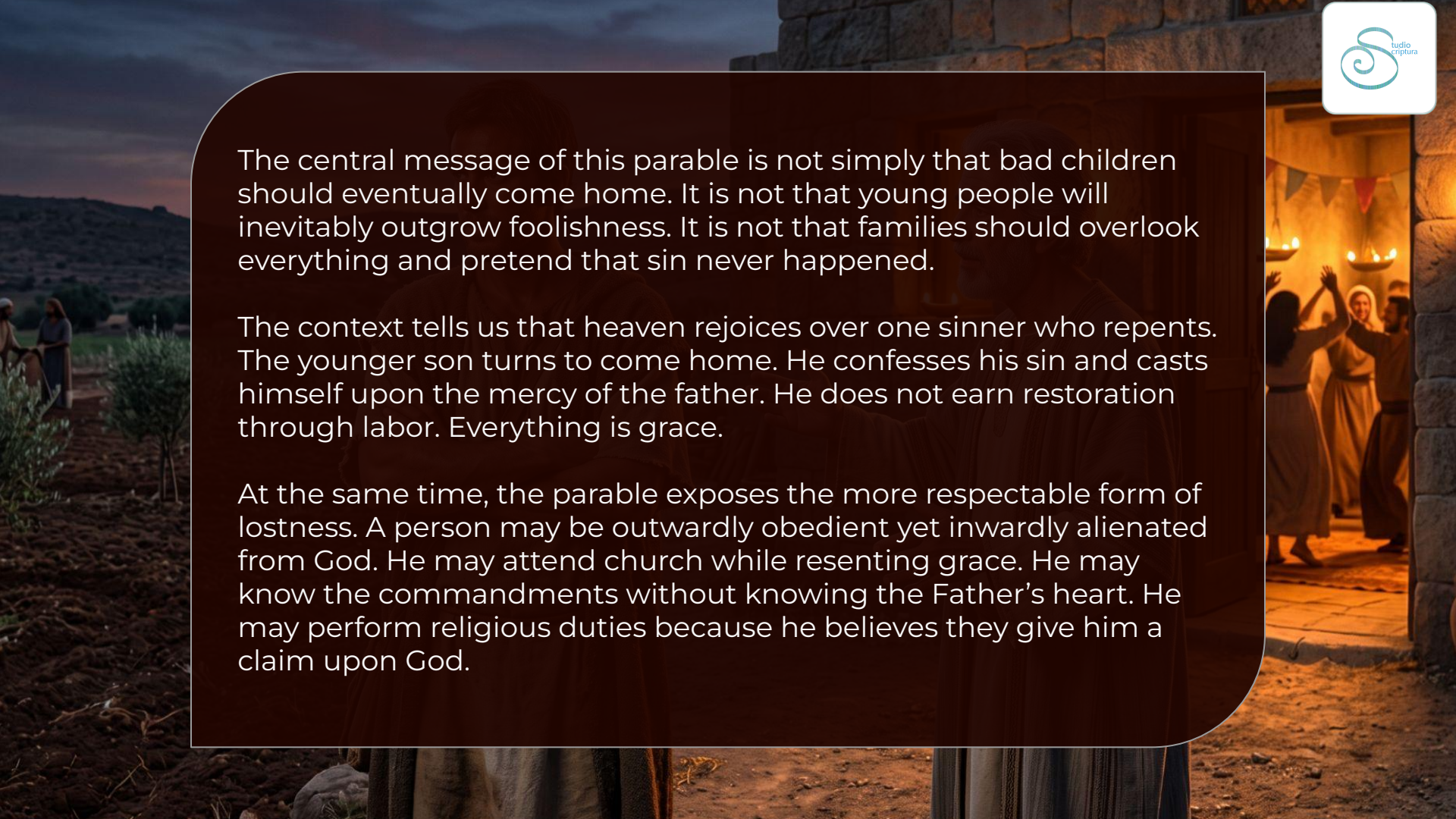
The father reminds him that he has not been deprived. The estate was divided earlier. The remaining property belongs to him. The celebration of mercy toward the younger son has not erased the father’s generosity toward the elder.

Grace shown to someone else does not diminish the grace God has shown to you. God does not possess a limited supply of mercy. When He forgives another sinner, He has not taken something from us.



The father continues: “It was right that we should make merry and be glad.” The celebration was necessary, fitting, and morally appropriate. How could the father not rejoice? His son was dead. His son is alive. His son was lost. His son has been found.

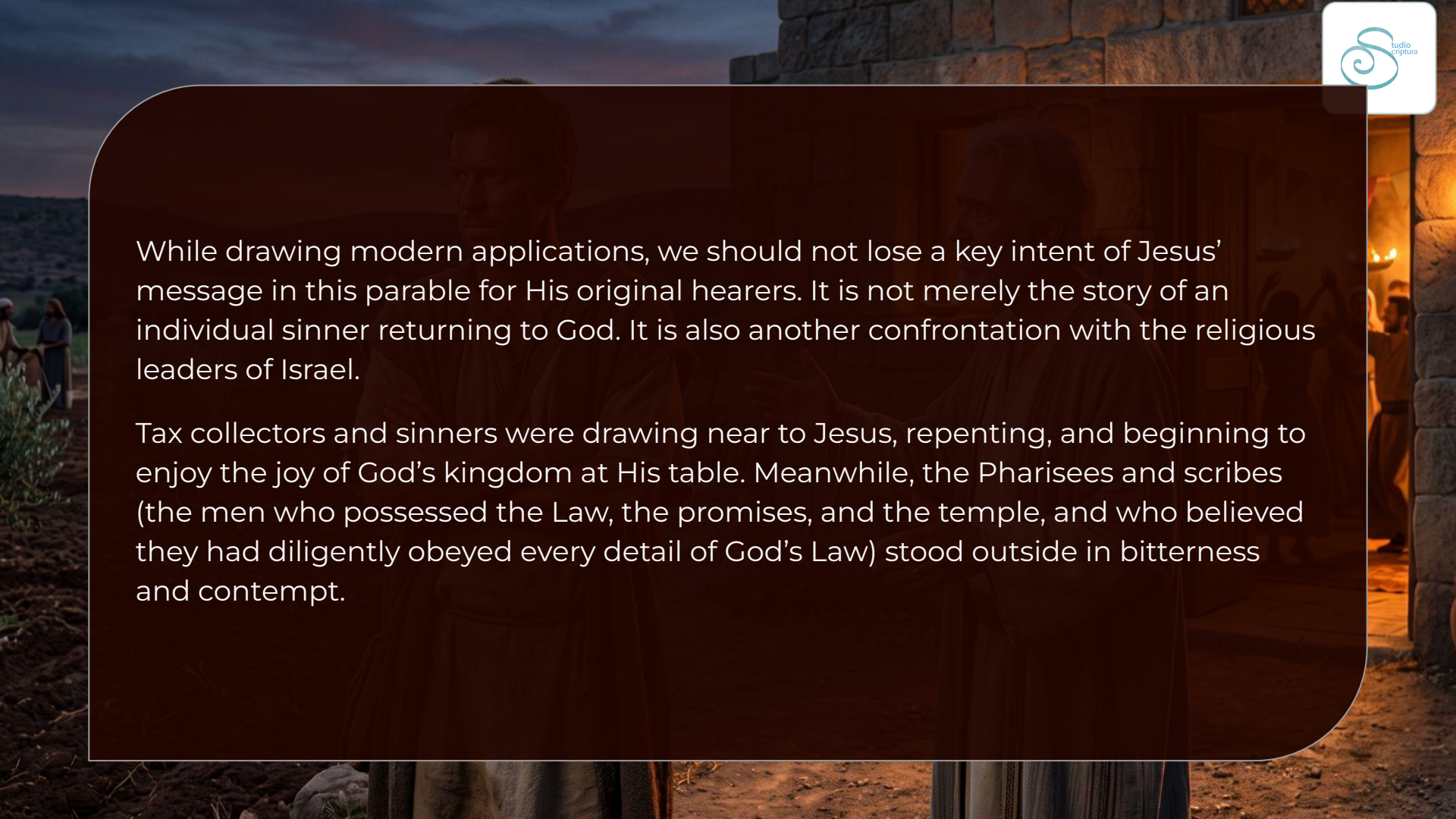
And Jesus leaves the story unfinished. Does the older brother enter the house? Does he continue standing outside? Does he accept his father’s grace? Does he embrace his brother? Does he acknowledge that he also has sinned?



The central message of this parable is not simply that bad children should eventually come home. It is not that young people will inevitably outgrow foolishness. It is not that families should overlook everything and pretend that sin never happened.

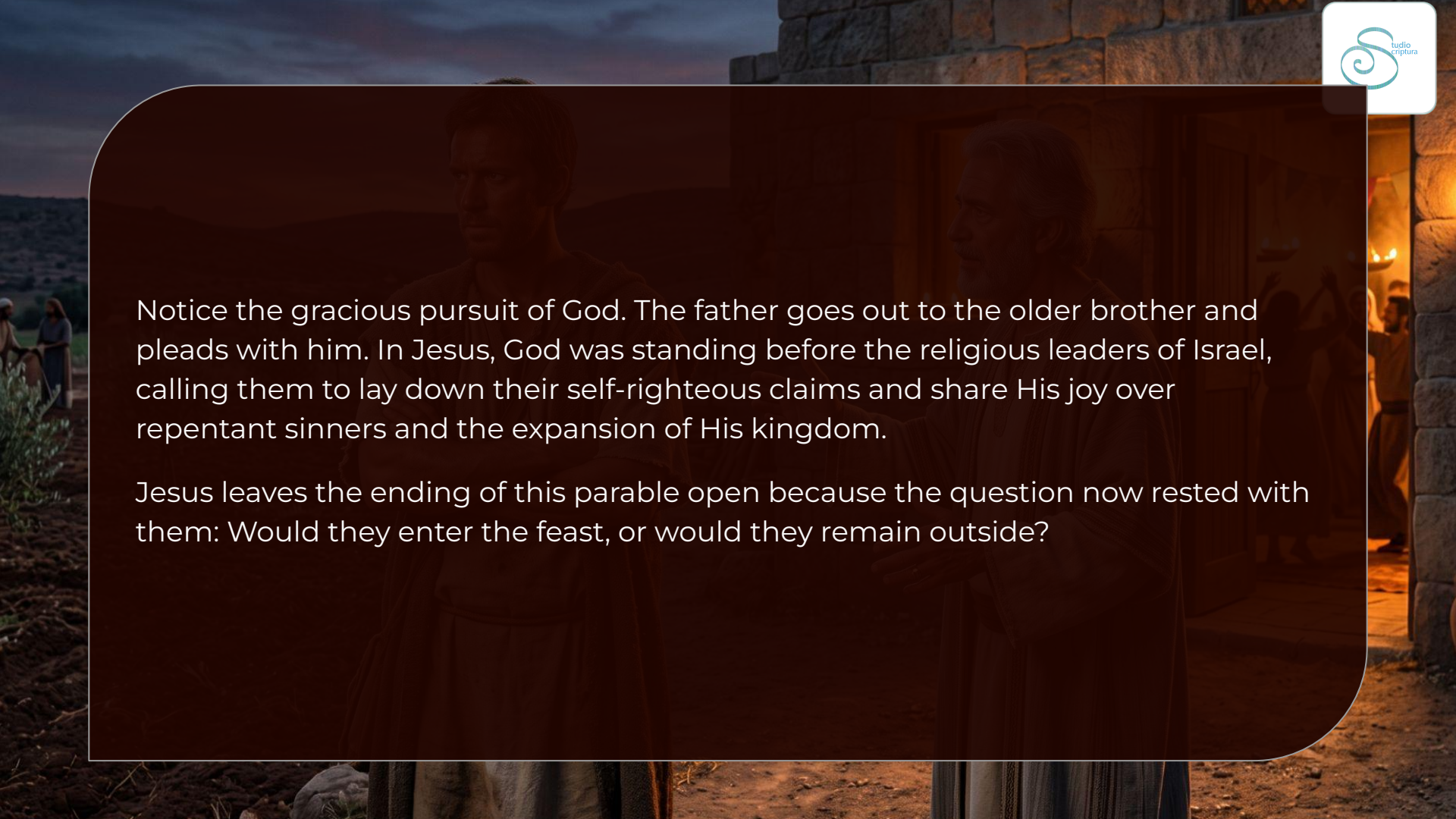
The context tells us that heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents. The younger son turns to come home. He confesses his sin and casts himself upon the mercy of the father. He does not earn restoration through labor. Everything is grace.

At the same time, the parable exposes the more respectable form of lostness. A person may be outwardly obedient yet inwardly alienated from God. He may attend church while resenting grace. He may know the commandments without knowing the Father’s heart. He may perform religious duties because he believes they give him a claim upon God.



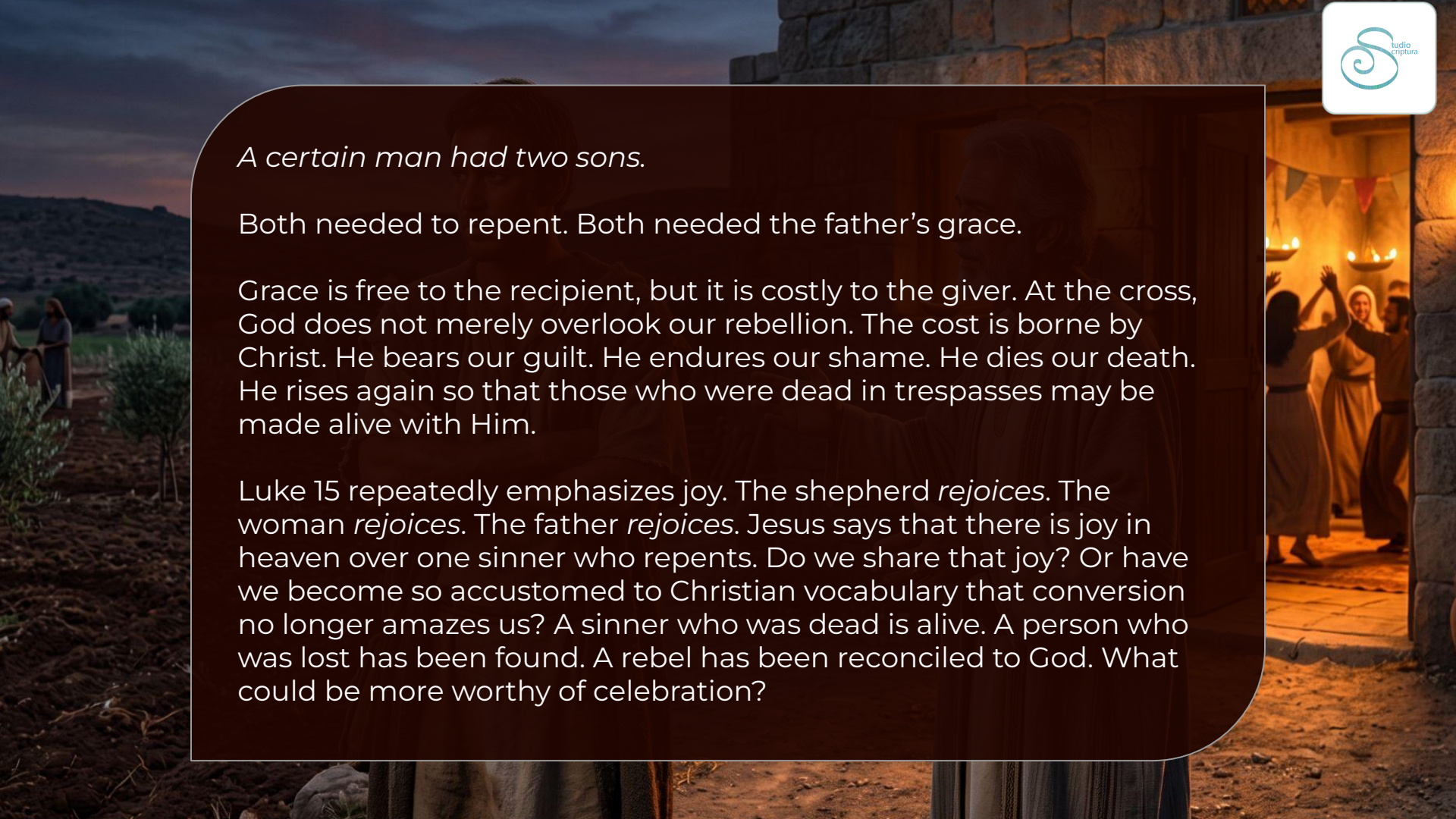
While drawing modern applications, we should not lose a key intent of Jesus' message in this parable for His original hearers. It is not merely the story of an individual sinner returning to God. It is also another confrontation with the religious leaders of Israel.

Tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to Jesus, repenting, and beginning to enjoy the joy of God's kingdom at His table. Meanwhile, the Pharisees and scribes (the men who possessed the Law, the promises, and the temple, and who believed they had diligently obeyed every detail of God's Law) stood outside in bitterness and contempt.



Notice the gracious pursuit of God. The father goes out to the older brother and pleads with him. In Jesus, God was standing before the religious leaders of Israel, calling them to lay down their self-righteous claims and share His joy over repentant sinners and the expansion of His kingdom.

Jesus leaves the ending of this parable open because the question now rested with them: Would they enter the feast, or would they remain outside?

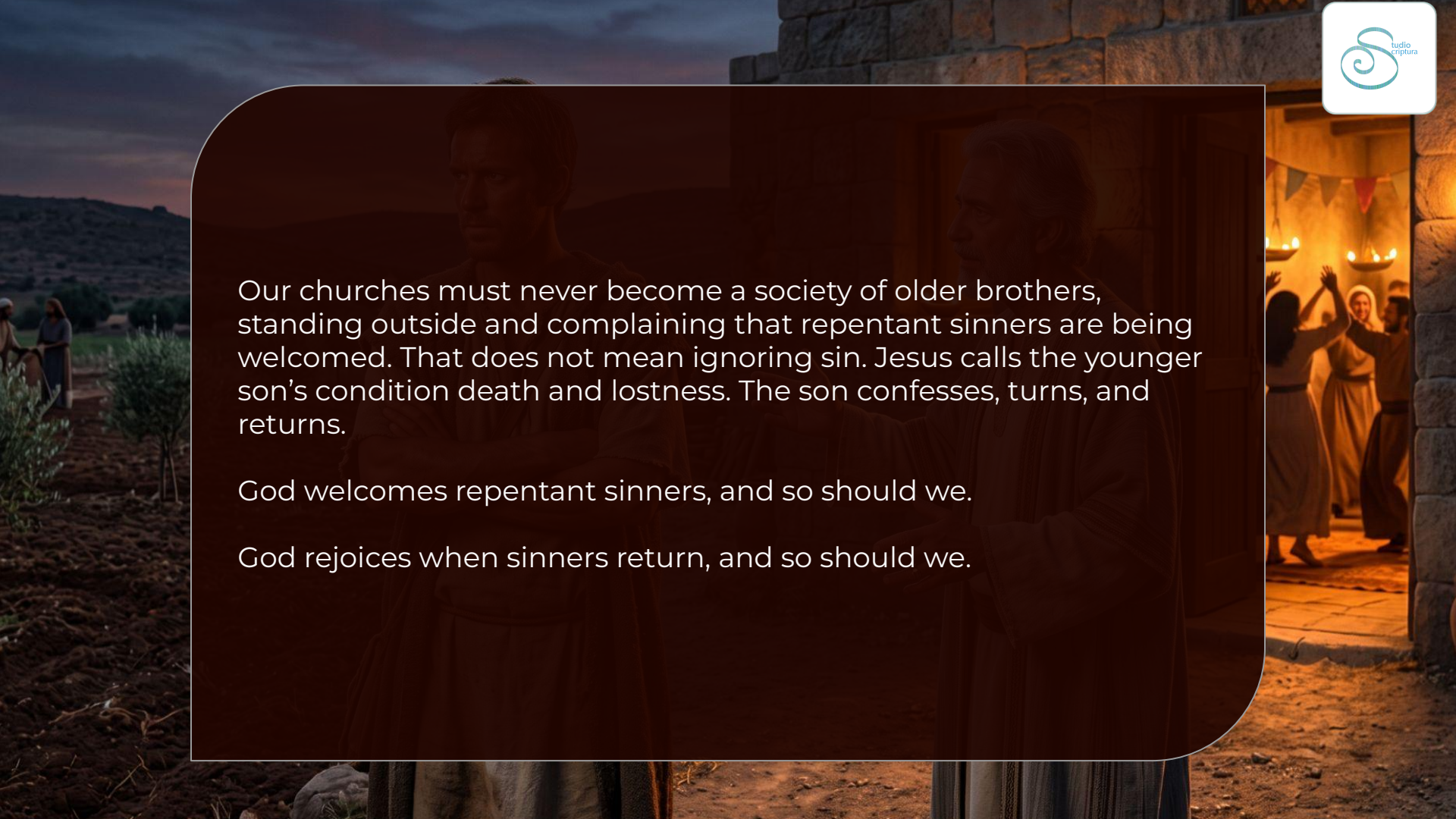


A certain man had two sons.

Both needed to repent. Both needed the father's grace.

Grace is free to the recipient, but it is costly to the giver. At the cross, God does not merely overlook our rebellion. The cost is borne by Christ. He bears our guilt. He endures our shame. He dies our death. He rises again so that those who were dead in trespasses may be made alive with Him.

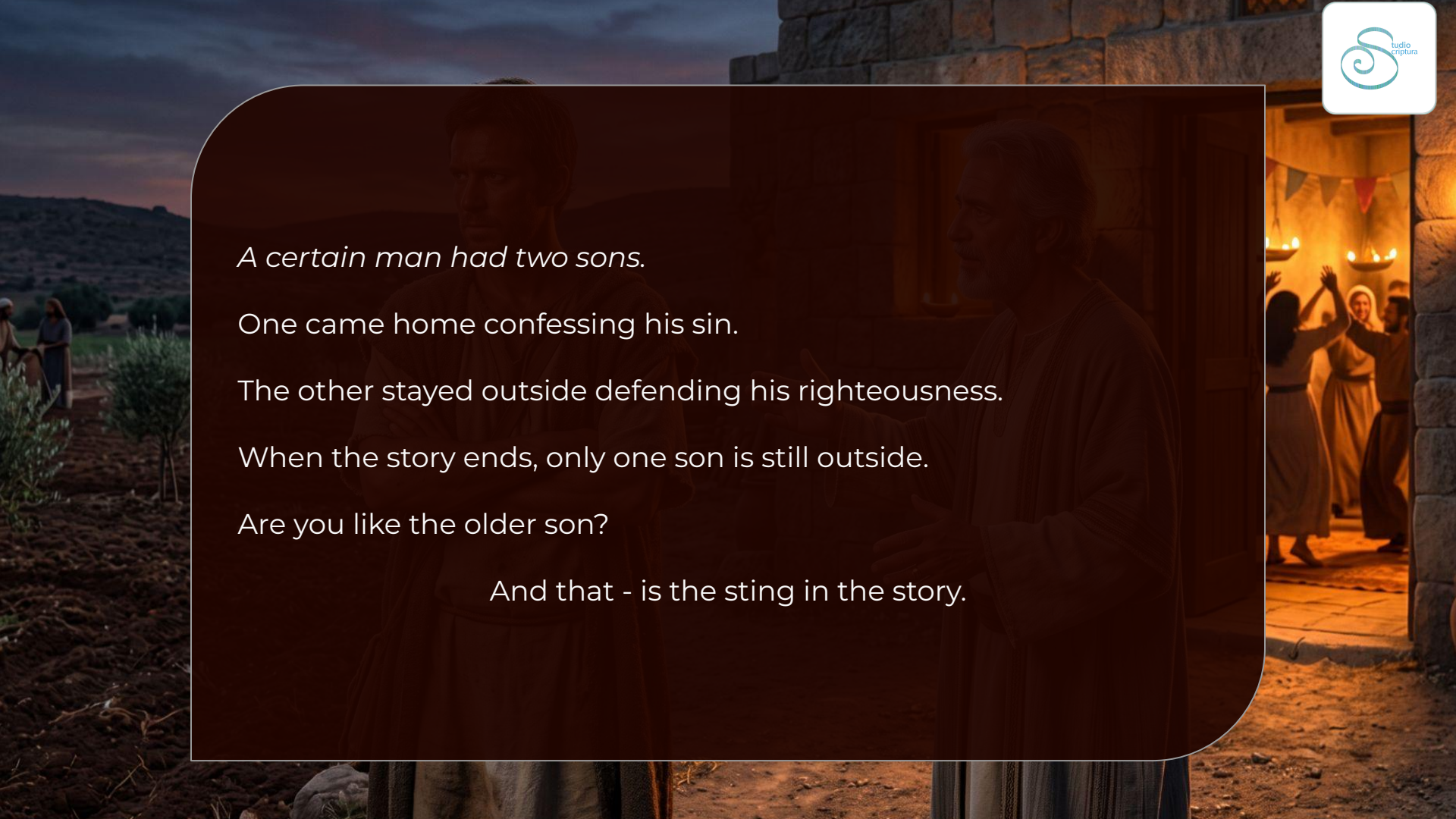
Luke 15 repeatedly emphasizes joy. The shepherd *rejoices*. The woman *rejoices*. The father *rejoices*. Jesus says that there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents. Do we share that joy? Or have we become so accustomed to Christian vocabulary that conversion no longer amazes us? A sinner who was dead is alive. A person who was lost has been found. A rebel has been reconciled to God. What could be more worthy of celebration?



Our churches must never become a society of older brothers, standing outside and complaining that repentant sinners are being welcomed. That does not mean ignoring sin. Jesus calls the younger son's condition death and lostness. The son confesses, turns, and returns.

God welcomes repentant sinners, and so should we.

God rejoices when sinners return, and so should we.



A certain man had two sons.

One came home confessing his sin.

The other stayed outside defending his righteousness.

When the story ends, only one son is still outside.

Are you like the older son?

And that - is the sting in the story.



Stories That *Sting*
The Good Samaritan

Too Important to Care
But One Man Crossed the Road

Text: Luke 10:25–37

A priest, a lawyer, and a Samaritan walk into a bar....

Well, not exactly. They walk onto a road, a steep and often dangerous road descending through the Judean wilderness from Jerusalem to Jericho. One man is already lying there, stripped of his clothing, beaten, bleeding, and close to death.

The question Jesus places before us is not whether the people traveling that road will recognize that this man needs help. Everyone in the story sees that.

The question is what they will (what you will) do after they see him.





We need two brief preliminaries as we begin: where we are in Gospel narrative and how we should read a parable.

Context and hermeneutics matter so that we may study as “a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

We have discussed parables in several previous lessons, so this is only a reminder before we enter the text.

Luke 10 occurs after the turning point in Luke 9:51: “Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.” Jesus has begun the final great movement of His earthly ministry toward Jerusalem.

The cross now stands in front of Him, and He is teaching His disciples what it means to follow a Messiah who will suffer, die, rise, and establish His kingdom in a manner very different from what most expected.





Just before our passage, the seventy disciples return rejoicing that even the demons were subject to them in Jesus' name. Jesus redirects their joy: "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

That statement is already relevant to the question the lawyer is about to ask. The lawyer will ask what he *must do to inherit eternal life*, but the disciples have just been reminded that their deepest security rests not in what they have accomplished in ministry, but in the gracious saving work of God.

After that background, a highly educated expert in the Law stands up to *examine* Jesus. A professionally religious man rises, confident in his learning, to test the Son of God.

A parable is a true-to-life story or comparison told to reveal a truth, answer a question, or expose the heart. The people listening to Jesus would have recognized the world of this parable. They knew the road from Jerusalem to Jericho. They knew travellers could be attacked. They knew what priests and Levites did. They certainly knew who the Samaritans were.

Jesus did not place His stories in an imaginary fairy-tale world. He placed them in the familiar world of farms, weddings, family, debt, employment, landlords, servants, courts, robbers, and roads. That realism is part of the power of a parable. The listener enters the story before realizing that the story has entered him.





We note that this parable of the Good Samaritan has been particularly vulnerable through the centuries to allegorical treatment. Some early Church interpreters made the wounded man fallen humanity, Jerusalem paradise, Jericho the fallen world, the robbers Satan and his demons, the priest the Law, the Levite the Prophets, and the inn the church.

Some of those illustrations may be interesting and produce Christian reflection but that is not the intended point of Jesus in providing this parable.

Jesus told this story in response to a particular man who asked a specific question for a particular reason. If we skip the lawyer, his question and his motive to justify himself, we then miss the force of the parable.

We begin by asking what Jesus intended to say to this lawyer and what Luke intends us to understand from the encounter. The lawyer asks, “Who is my neighbor?” because he wants to establish the limits of his responsibility.

Jesus responds by exposing the condition of his heart.





The word translated *lawyer* is *nomikos*. This is not primarily a Roman civil attorney arguing property disputes. He is an expert in the Mosaic Law, an educated interpreter of the Torah and the religious traditions that had developed around it.

We might describe him as an attorney/theologian. He knows the biblical text, the interpretive disputes, and the rulings of previous rabbis.

People look to men like him to explain what God requires and how the commandments should be applied to the complexities of daily life.

It does not appear the lawyer approached Jesus privately. Rather he likely stands up in the midst of a gathering. Others are listening, and he evidently wants them to hear the exchange.

This is a public theological examination, and his question resonates with all who hear it:

“Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25).





What happens when I die? How can I stand before God? How may I enter heaven?

Many people suppress these questions. They bury them beneath careers, families, travel, education, possessions, and politics. And even bury them beneath religion.

But the questions remain. Suppose judgment is real. Then what?

No questions could be more consequential.

Luke tells us, however, that the man's question is not entirely sincere. He stood up and *tested* Jesus. The Greek word is related to the term used when Jesus was tempted in the wilderness in Luke 4.

The lawyer is not approaching as a broken sinner asking to be saved. He is cross-examining Jesus. He wants to test His theological competence, expose a weakness in His answer, or force Him to take a side in a disputed question.

This is a theological deposition.





There is extraordinary irony here. A doctor of the Law is standing before the One by whom the Law was written.

A sinner is examining the Judge of sinners. The man places Jesus in the witness box, not realizing that before the conversation is over, he will be the one exposed.

We should therefore never assume that biblical literacy, theological vocabulary, or denominational standing necessarily indicate a repentant heart and saving faith.

Religious people may know the vocabulary, quote the proper authors, and understand the debates - while approaching Christ primarily as a life-coach to justify their lifestyle and to test God rather than trust Him.





Jesus replies, “What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?” (Luke 10:26).

This raises an immediate theological question for us today. We believe that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We believe that no sinner is justified by works of the Law. Paul states it plainly: “By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).

Why, then, does Jesus point this man to the Law? Why does He not tell him, as He told Nicodemus, that he *must be born again* (John 3:3)? Why does He not call him directly to repentance and faith? Why does He not give what we would immediately recognize as a gospel presentation?





The answer begins with the condition of the man's heart. The lawyer asks a works-related question: "What shall I do?" Jesus meets him on the ground he has chosen.

The man assumes that eternal life can be secured through his obedience, so Jesus places before him the true demand of the Law, not the manageable version produced by selective interpretation and religious tradition, but the full, penetrating demand of perfect love.

Jesus is not suggesting that the man can perform one or two more charitable acts and thereby earn salvation. He is holding up the Law as a mirror. One of the principal uses of God's Law is to reveal His holiness and expose our sinfulness.

The Law does not create our sin, but it identifies and uncovers it. It brings our moral condition into the light, silences our excuses, and strips away our claims of self-righteousness.





Paul explains that “the law was our tutor/schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). The image is not only of a classroom teacher giving information, but of a guardian who takes the child to the classroom. The Law takes the sinner by the hand, exposes his guilt, and leads him to the only One who can save him. It says, in effect, “You are not righteous. You cannot justify yourself. You need Christ.”

Jesus is therefore not avoiding evangelism. He is evangelizing a legalist. This man does not yet believe he needs mercy. Before he will receive the cure, he must recognize the disease. Before he will ask to be justified by God, he must stop trying to justify himself.

Only Jesus Christ perfectly obeyed the Father. He alone loved God without interruption and loved His neighbor without sin. He fulfilled the Law that we have broken and bore its curse in the place of His people.

Therefore, when Jesus says, “Do this and you will live,” He is not presenting law-keeping as a realistic alternative route to salvation. He is forcing the lawyer to confront the standard upon which the lawyer himself has chosen to stand.





That same self-justifying assumption appears wherever religion teaches that moral effort, ritual, or religious observance can finally secure acceptance with God without an atoning Savior.

It appears in Judaism's law-centered framework of covenant obedience and in religions of merit ("do this and you will earn favor with God"). And it appears naturally in every human heart.

We want to believe that we can do enough ourselves, improve enough, give enough, or obey enough to establish our own righteousness.

Jesus brings the full force of the Law against that illusion.

Jesus' two questions are carefully selected. "What is written in the law?" "What is your reading of it?"

What does the text actually say, and have you read it rightly?

It is possible to quote Scripture while using it to protect ourselves from the claim Scripture is making upon us. The lawyer knows the right words. Jesus is about to reveal that he has not allowed those words to change his heart.





The lawyer answers by joining Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,” and “your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). It is a well-crafted answer.

He begins with Israel’s great confession, the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The Hebrew word *shema* means more than allowing a sound to enter the ear. It calls for attentive hearing that results in obedience. God is not merely offering Israel information. He is demanding their attention and allegiance.

Deuteronomy 6 was given as Israel prepared to enter the Promised Land. Moses stood with a new generation on the plains of Moab, renewing the covenant and instructing the nation concerning life under the lordship of God.

We might describe Deuteronomy as Israel's covenant operating model. The Lord alone is God, and therefore Israel must "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (De 6:5)





The lawyer then joins that command to Leviticus 19:18: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love for God and love for neighbor summarize the moral demand of the Law. Jesus tells him, “You have answered rightly; do this and you will live” (Luke 10:28). The lawyer’s theology is correct. The problem is not his answer but his heart.

And the word “all” must be allowed to retain its force. Love God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind. There is no remainder, no corner of the heart reserved for another god, no portion of the mind withheld from God’s authority, and no moment in which love for God may be suspended.

The second command is equally searching. We instinctively notice our own hunger, pain, weariness, loneliness, reputation, and danger. We arrange our lives around our own concerns with remarkable consistency.

The command is to apply that same attentive concern to the person God places before us. Have we always loved God with the whole self? Have we always loved our neighbor as naturally and urgently as we love ourselves?

The answer for each of us, I dare say, is no.

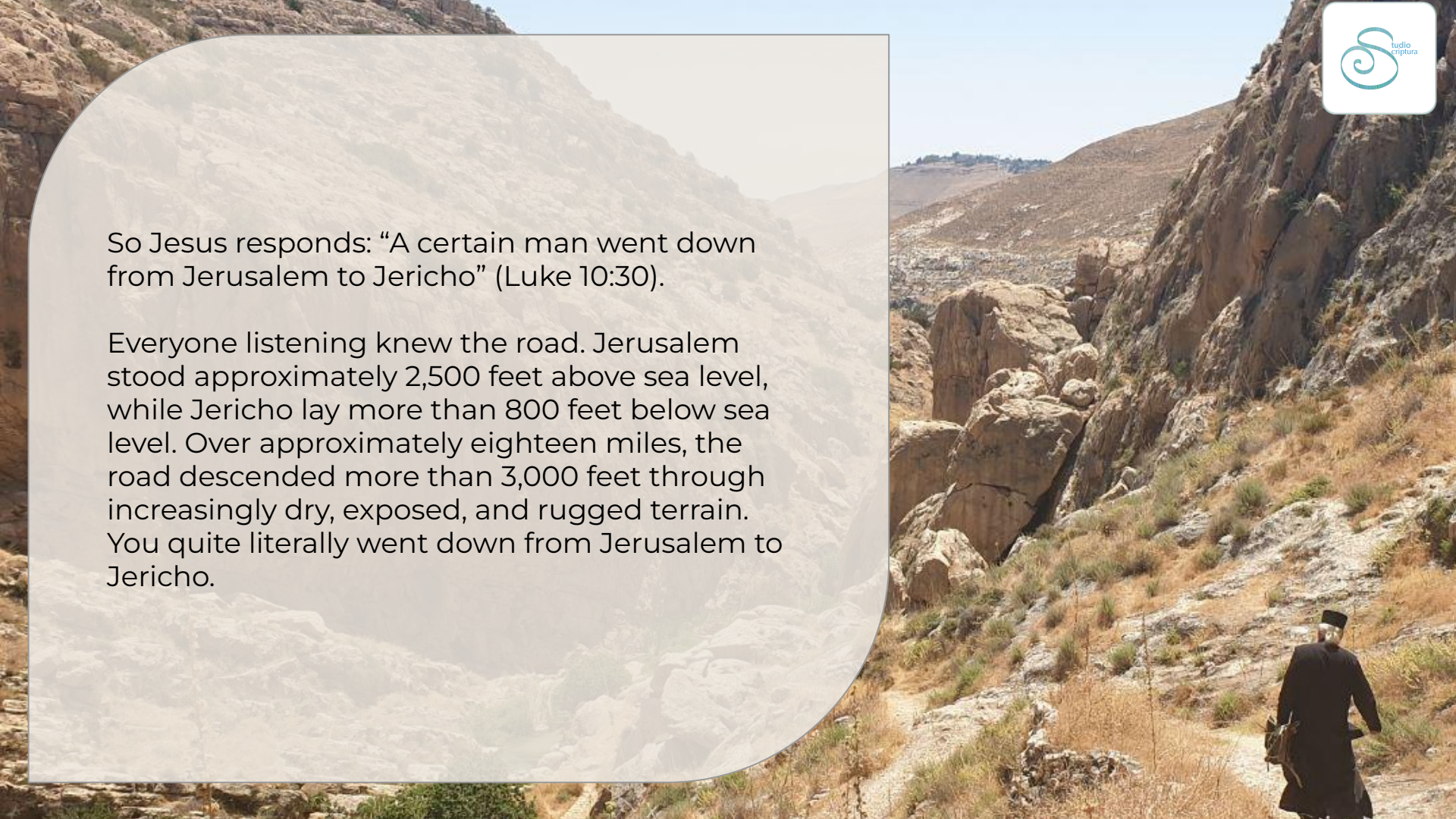




The lawyer is not yet willing to admit his guilt. Instead, like a good attorney (and like a self-righteous heart) he searches for a narrower definition. He wants a defensible loophole.

Luke tells us why: “wanting to justify himself.”

So he asks, “And who is my neighbor?” He is not seeking greater obedience; he is trying to limit his obligation.



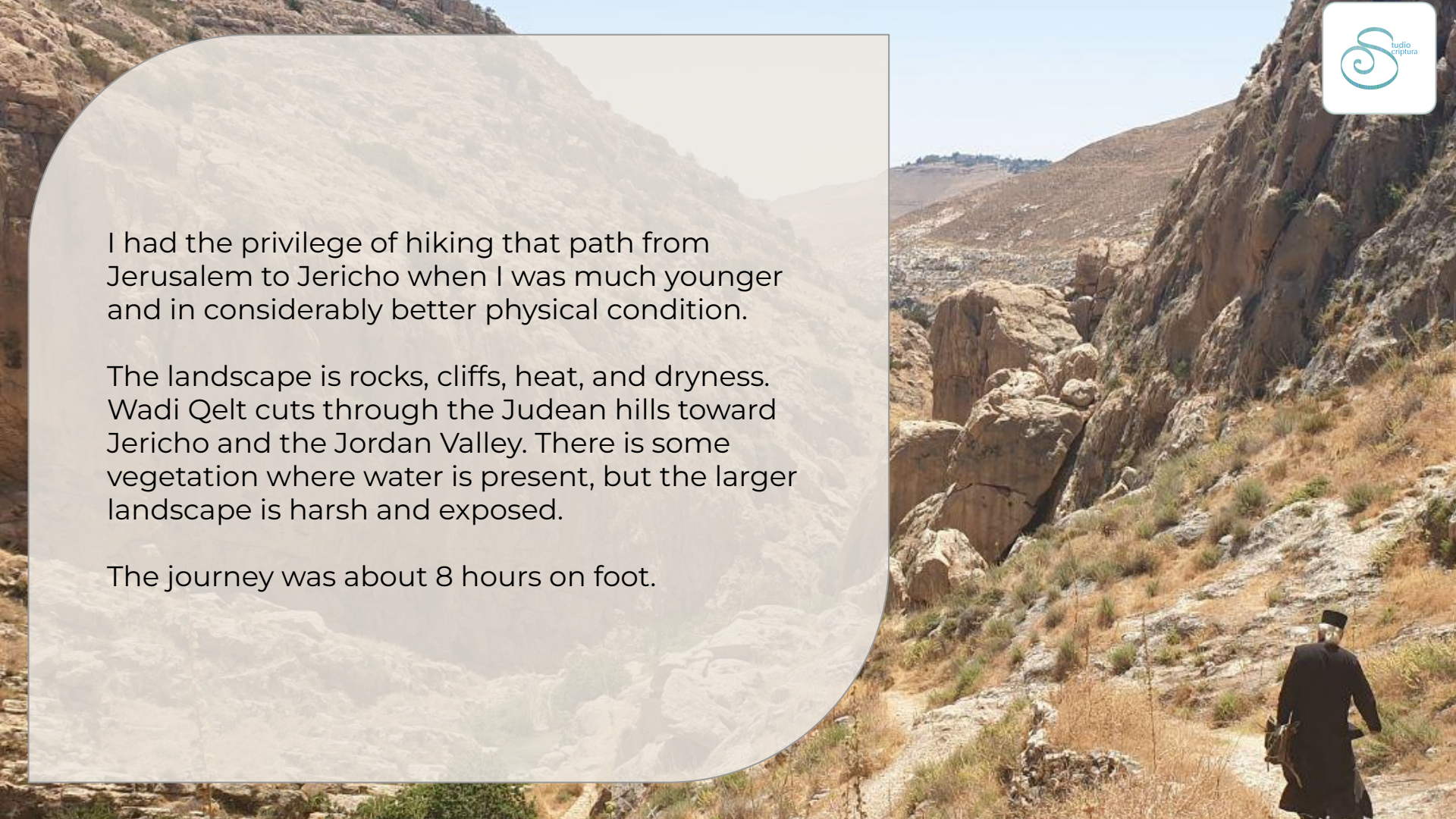
So Jesus responds: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho” (Luke 10:30).

Everyone listening knew the road. Jerusalem stood approximately 2,500 feet above sea level, while Jericho lay more than 800 feet below sea level. Over approximately eighteen miles, the road descended more than 3,000 feet through increasingly dry, exposed, and rugged terrain. You quite literally went down from Jerusalem to Jericho.



The higher areas nearer Jerusalem receive more moisture, but as one descends eastward into the Judean wilderness, the terrain becomes rocky, dry, steep, and hot. Ravines cut through the limestone and provide hiding places from which robbers could observe approaching travelers and then disappear after an attack.

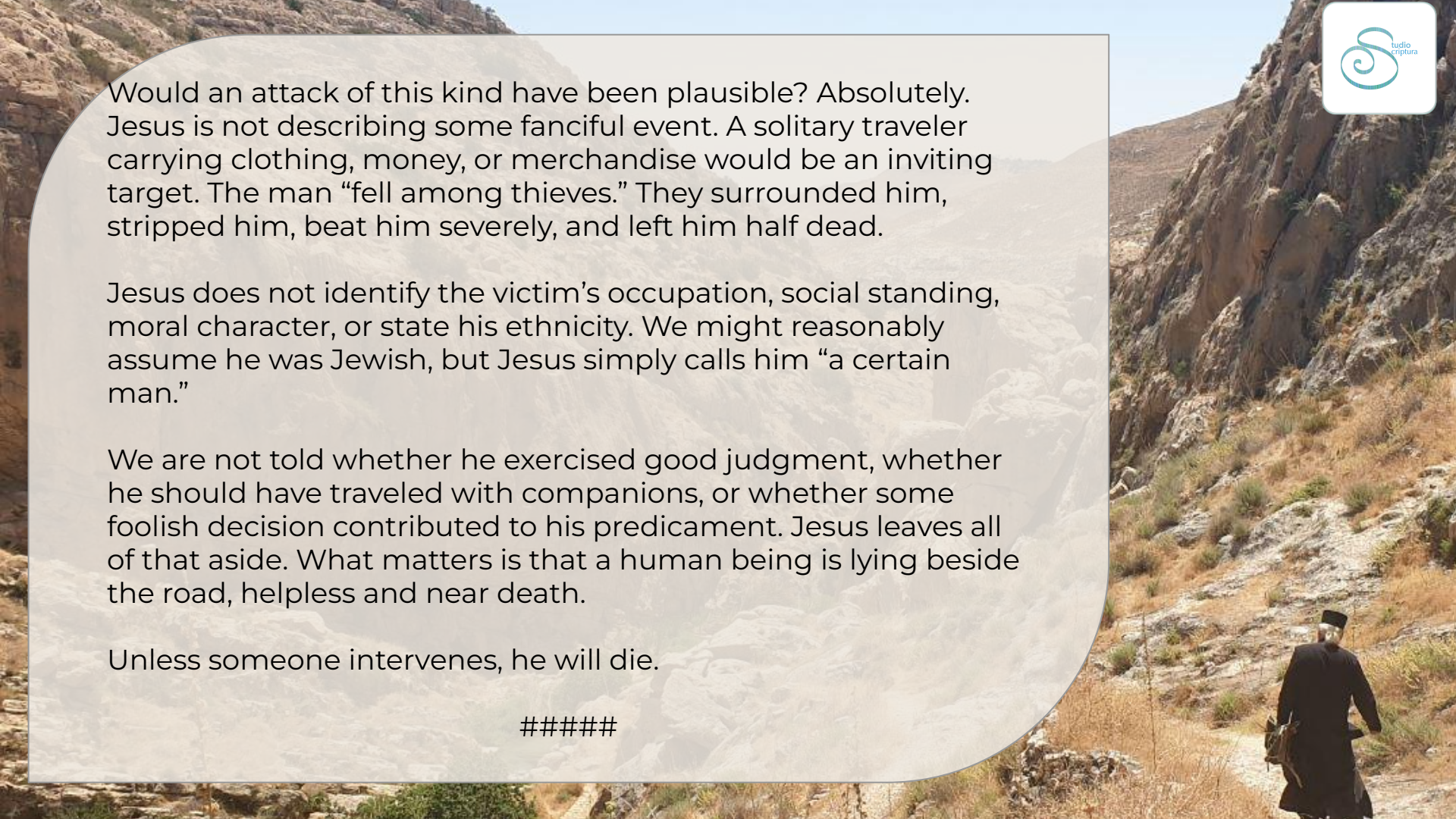
Pilgrims, merchants, soldiers, officials, priests, and ordinary travelers used the route, but it's periodic isolation also made it dangerous.



I had the privilege of hiking that path from Jerusalem to Jericho when I was much younger and in considerably better physical condition.

The landscape is rocks, cliffs, heat, and dryness. Wadi Qelt cuts through the Judean hills toward Jericho and the Jordan Valley. There is some vegetation where water is present, but the larger landscape is harsh and exposed.

The journey was about 8 hours on foot.



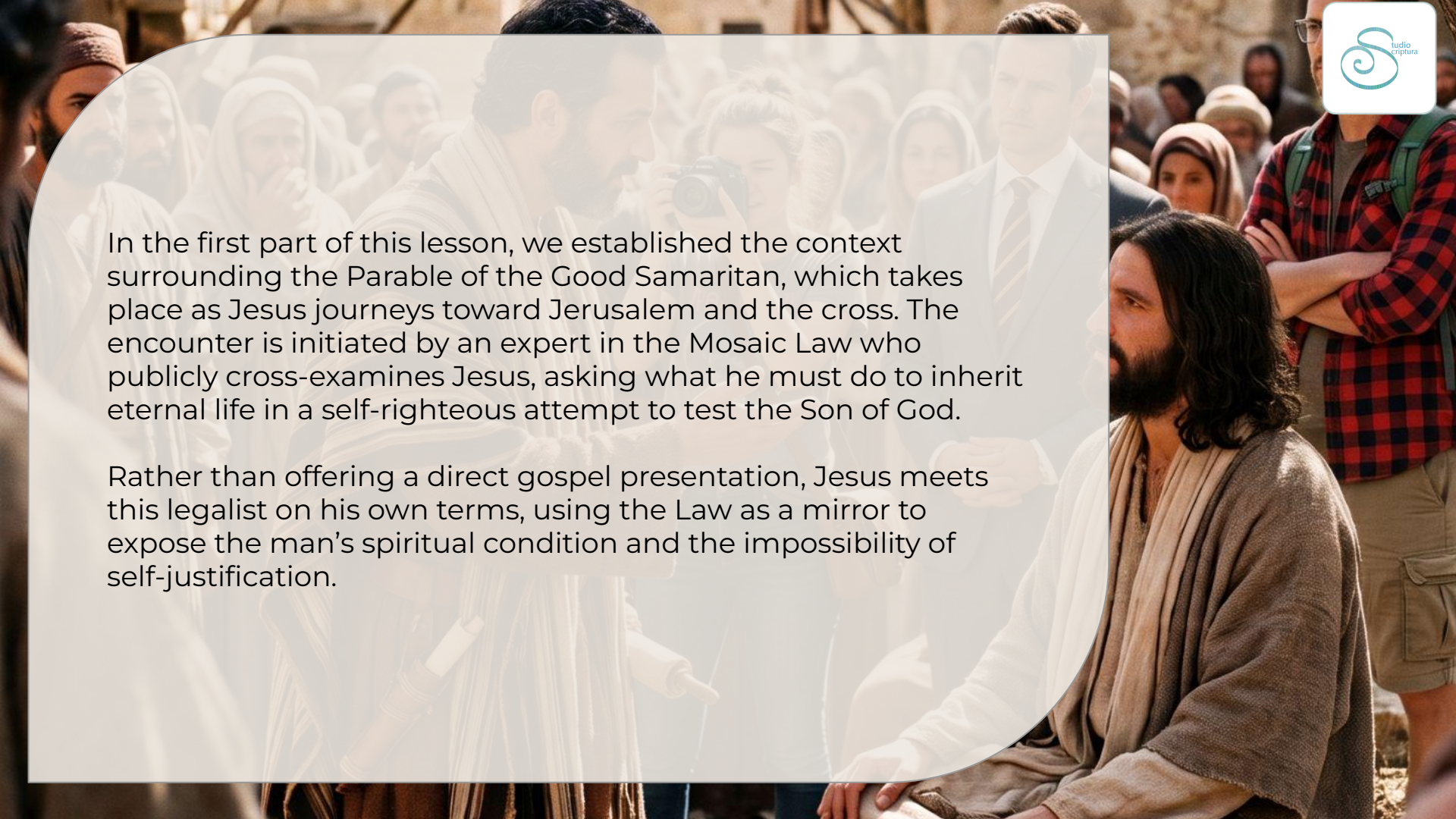
Would an attack of this kind have been plausible? Absolutely. Jesus is not describing some fanciful event. A solitary traveler carrying clothing, money, or merchandise would be an inviting target. The man “fell among thieves.” They surrounded him, stripped him, beat him severely, and left him half dead.

Jesus does not identify the victim’s occupation, social standing, moral character, or state his ethnicity. We might reasonably assume he was Jewish, but Jesus simply calls him “a certain man.”

We are not told whether he exercised good judgment, whether he should have traveled with companions, or whether some foolish decision contributed to his predicament. Jesus leaves all of that aside. What matters is that a human being is lying beside the road, helpless and near death.

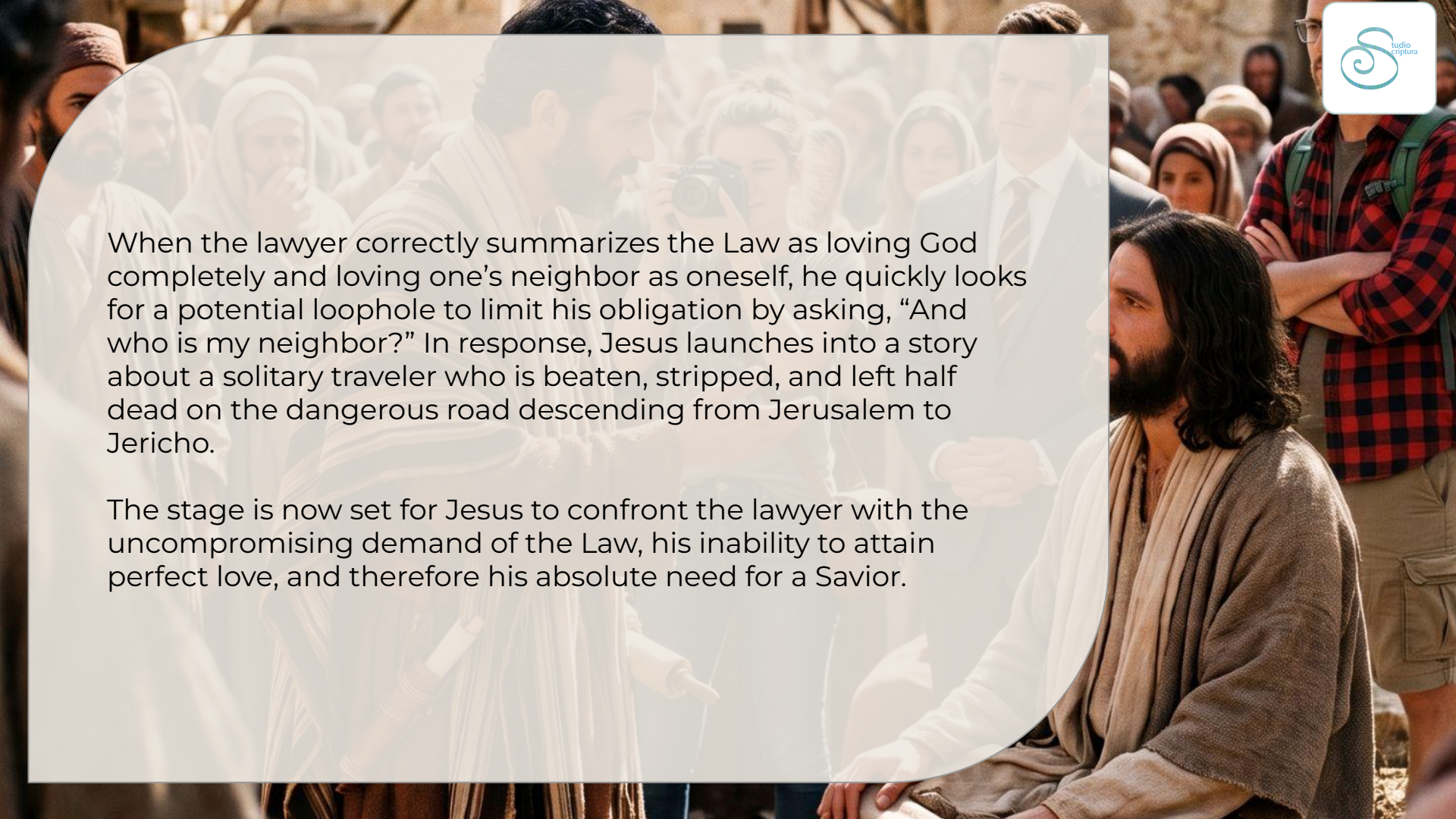
Unless someone intervenes, he will die.

#####



In the first part of this lesson, we established the context surrounding the Parable of the Good Samaritan, which takes place as Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem and the cross. The encounter is initiated by an expert in the Mosaic Law who publicly cross-examines Jesus, asking what he must do to inherit eternal life in a self-righteous attempt to test the Son of God.

Rather than offering a direct gospel presentation, Jesus meets this legalist on his own terms, using the Law as a mirror to expose the man’s spiritual condition and the impossibility of self-justification.



When the lawyer correctly summarizes the Law as loving God completely and loving one's neighbor as oneself, he quickly looks for a potential loophole to limit his obligation by asking, "And who is my neighbor?" In response, Jesus launches into a story about a solitary traveler who is beaten, stripped, and left half dead on the dangerous road descending from Jerusalem to Jericho.

The stage is now set for Jesus to confront the lawyer with the uncompromising demand of the Law, his inability to attain perfect love, and therefore his absolute need for a Savior.





“Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:31).

The priest is a descendant of Aaron, a member of the tribe of Levi set apart for sacred service. He has been trained in the Law. If anyone should understand Deuteronomy 6 and Leviticus 19, then he’s the guy!

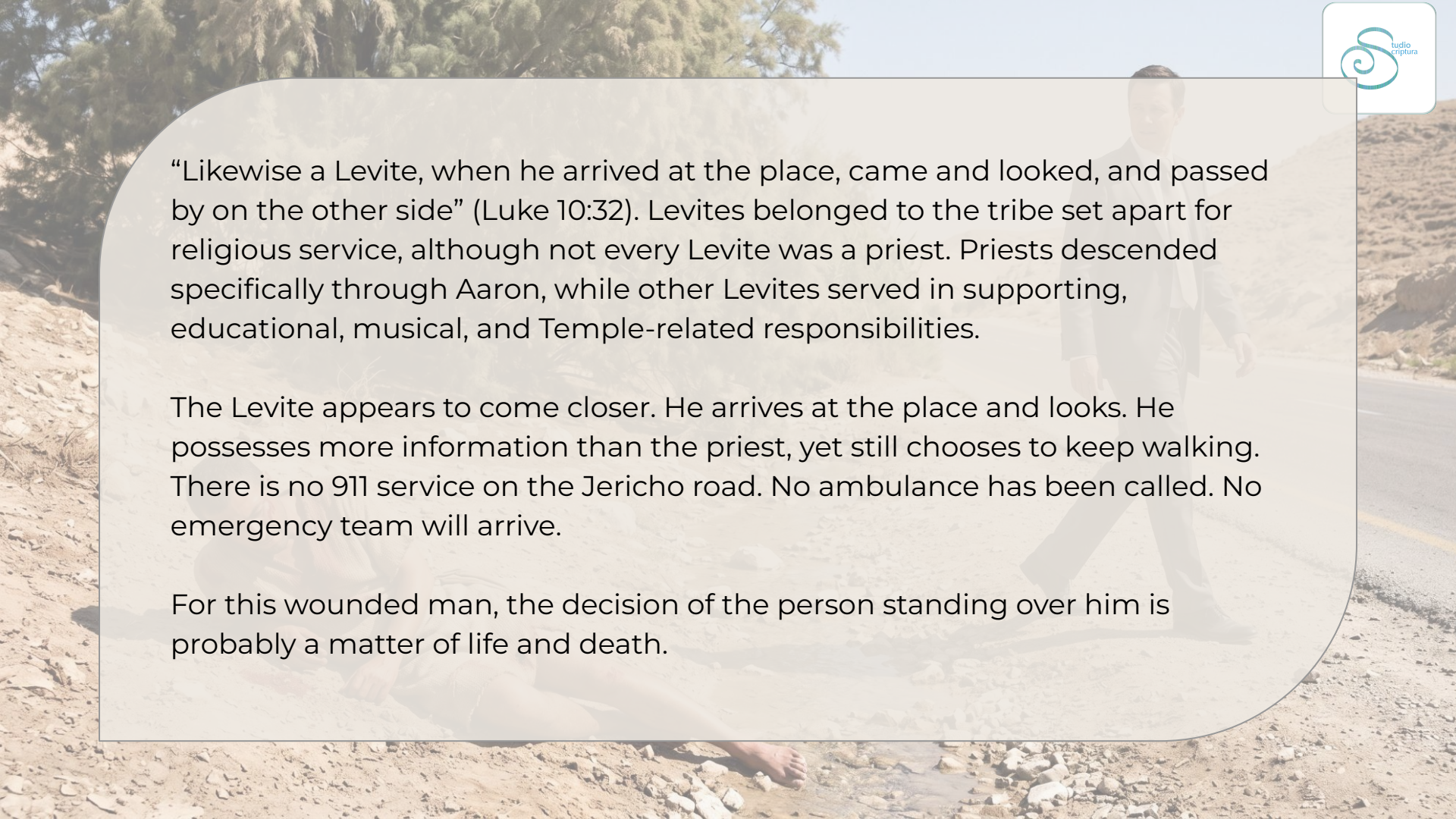
Interpreters have proposed several possible explanations. He may have feared ceremonial defilement if the man was dead. He could have suspected the robbers were still nearby and regarded the victim as bait for another attack. Or he simply considered his own schedule (and that next text message) as too important to interrupt.

The priest’s internal rationale is not the point. Whatever his explanation (fear, inconvenience, or indifference) the result is the same.

A man is dying, the priest sees him, and he passes by.







“Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side” (Luke 10:32). Levites belonged to the tribe set apart for religious service, although not every Levite was a priest. Priests descended specifically through Aaron, while other Levites served in supporting, educational, musical, and Temple-related responsibilities.

The Levite appears to come closer. He arrives at the place and looks. He possesses more information than the priest, yet still chooses to keep walking. There is no 911 service on the Jericho road. No ambulance has been called. No emergency team will arrive.

For this wounded man, the decision of the person standing over him is probably a matter of life and death.

It is possible to see suffering without truly seeing the sufferer. We may see a statistic, a social problem, an irresponsible person, or a need so complicated that we feel justified doing nothing - or just overwhelmed.

Some situations rightly require caution, and no one has the resources or responsibility to answer every need in the world. Prudence may tell us not to stop, but Christian mercy may still require us to pull off at the next exit, call for help, give the precise location, and make sure someone is coming.

Apparent prudence can quietly become a disguise for indifference when it excuses us from doing the good that remains safely within our reach. We can construct a sophisticated explanation for why a particular need is not ours or just too dangerous while the person continues bleeding beside the road.

Compassion crosses the road.

Then Jesus speaks the words no one expects: “But a certain Samaritan” (Luke 10:33). The audience may have expected the third person to be an ordinary Israelite. Perhaps a faithful but ordinary Jewish layman. The religious professionals fail, but the ordinary Israelite obeys. Jesus destroys the expected pattern.

The third traveler is a ***Samaritan***.

To feel the force of that word, we need some history. The conflict between Jews and Samaritans was not a mild cultural friction. It was centuries old, religious, ethnic, political, and at times violent. Both communities regarded the other as corrupt, and both believed they possessed substantial historical reasons for doing so.

After Solomon’s death, the kingdom divided. The northern kingdom retained the name Israel, while the southern kingdom became Judah. The northern kingdom eventually established its capital at Samaria and repeatedly descended into idolatry under Jeroboam and the kings who followed.

In 722 B.C., Assyria conquered the northern kingdom, deported many of its inhabitants, and resettled people from other parts of the empire in the region. Second Kings 17 describes a syncretistic religious situation (blending the worship of the Lord with pagan beliefs and practices) in which people feared the Lord (sort of) while also serving other gods.

Later Jewish descriptions emphasized the *mixed* population and *mixed* worship when explaining Samaritan origins.

The Samaritans understood their own history differently. They regarded themselves as faithful descendants of ancient Israel who had preserved the true worship of God while Jerusalem had corrupted it. The precise development of the Samaritan community is historically complex.

The Samaritans centered worship at Mount Gerizim near Shechem. They received their own form of the Pentateuch as sacred Scripture and believed that Mount Gerizim (not Jerusalem) was the divinely appointed place of worship.

After the Babylonian exile, political opposition and competing claims concerning land, identity, priesthood, Scripture, and worship hardened the division. In the late second century B.C., the Jewish Hasmonean ruler John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan sanctuary on Mount Gerizim, intensifying the hostility between the communities.

Josephus later records a story that Samaritans entered the Jerusalem Temple precincts and scattered human remains there during a festival, ceremonially defiling the area (Josephus, Antiquities 18.29–30).

Whether every detail can be independently confirmed, the existence of such a story illustrates the hostility remembered between the two groups.

The New Testament itself gives us additional evidence. John explains that “Jews have no dealings with Samaritans” (John 4:9).

In John 8, Jesus’ opponents attempt to insult Him by asking, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (John 8:48).

Just before the story of the Good Samaritan, a Samaritan village refuses to receive Jesus as His face is set toward Jerusalem. James and John respond by asking whether they should call down fire from heaven (Luke 9:51–56).

So it is no surprise that by the first century, Jews and Samaritans regarded one another as heretics and religious rivals. Now Jesus places a Samaritan on the Jericho road and makes him central to His parable.

The original lawyer is not being asked merely to admit that someone a bit different can occasionally perform a kind act. He is being compelled to recognize moral excellence in a person he has been trained to distrust, dislike, and despise.

The Samaritan is the heretic - he is a man who worships in the wrong place, understands Scripture wrongly, and belongs to a community with a long history of conflict with the Jewish people.

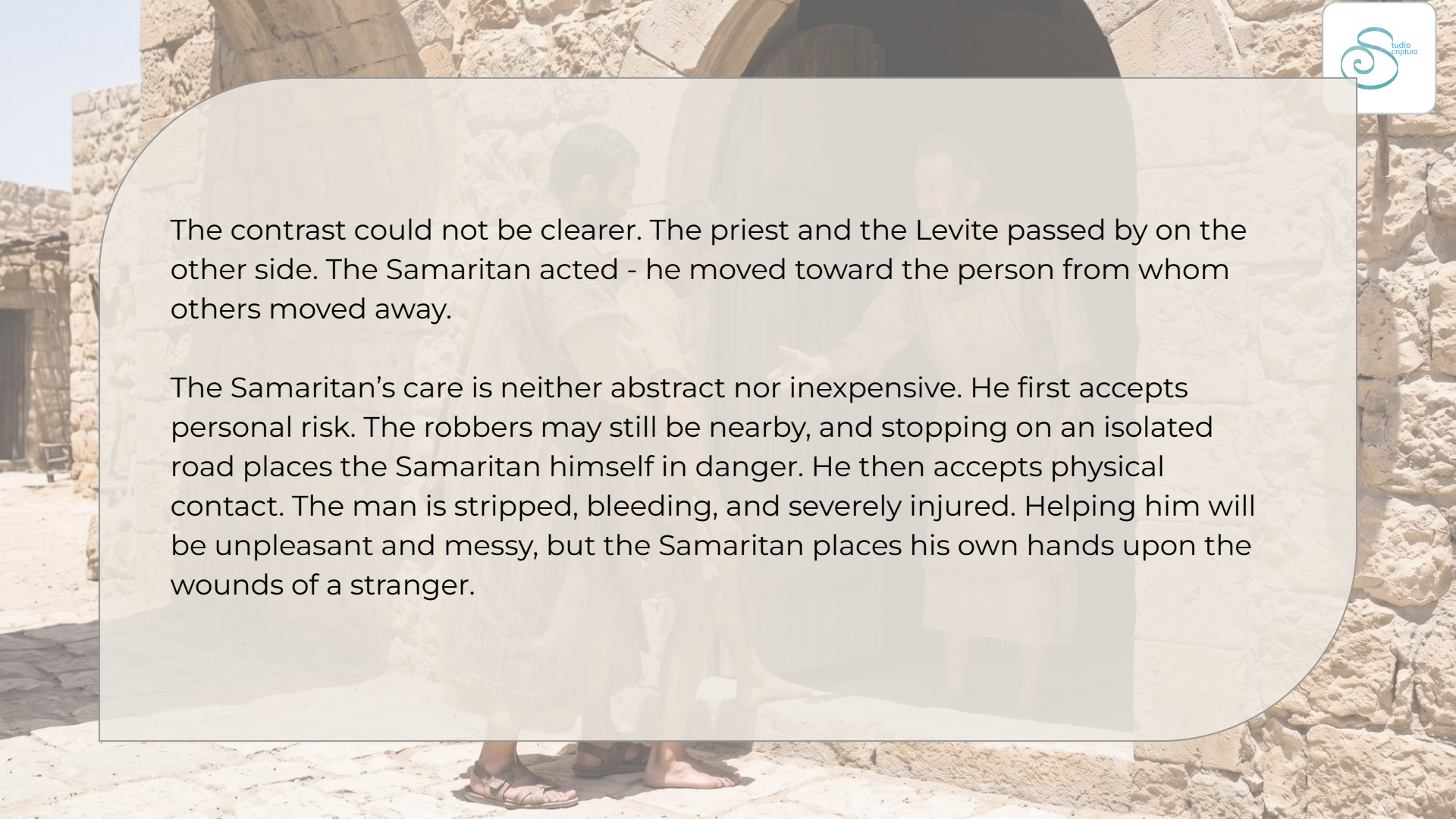
The Samaritan's role in the story does not mean that Jesus is endorsing Samaritan theology, false worship, or religious error. The point of the parable is not that doctrine does not matter, but that doctrinal and cultural hostility cannot become an excuse for withholding mercy from a person in need. We must let the parable make the point Jesus Himself makes at the end: Which man proved to be a neighbor? "He who showed mercy on him." "Go and do likewise."

And what does Jesus say?

“When he saw him, he had compassion” (Luke 10:33). The priest saw the man. The Levite saw the man. But the Samaritan had compassion. The Greek word describes a deep, visceral response to suffering. Luke uses the same word when Jesus sees the widow of Nain walking behind the body of her only son. Jesus “had compassion on her,” stopped the funeral procession, touched the coffin, and raised the young man from the dead (Luke 7:13–15).

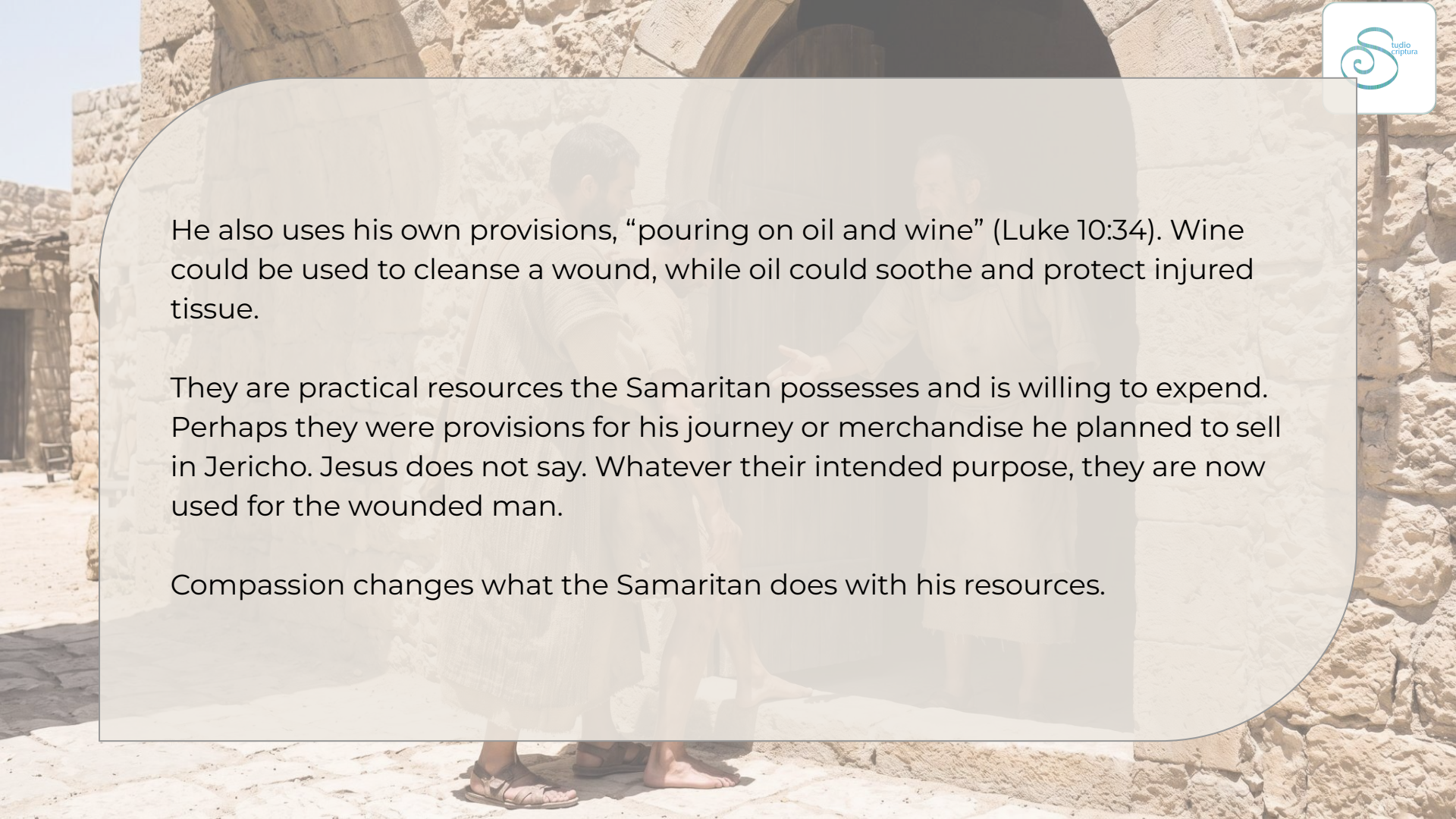
In both passages, compassion produces action.

Notice the verbs in the Samaritan's response: "So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.'" Luke 10:34-35



The contrast could not be clearer. The priest and the Levite passed by on the other side. The Samaritan acted - he moved toward the person from whom others moved away.

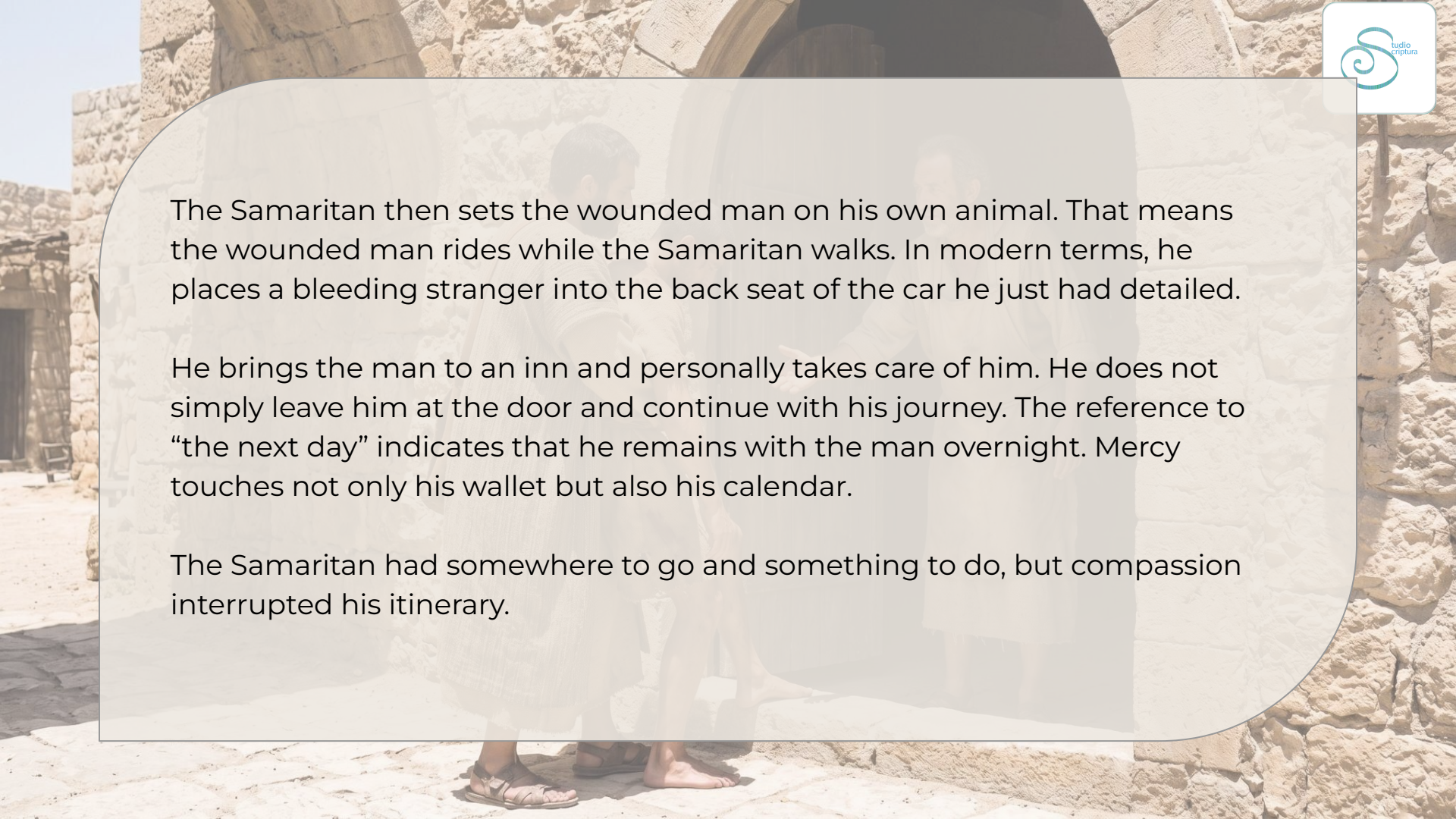
The Samaritan’s care is neither abstract nor inexpensive. He first accepts personal risk. The robbers may still be nearby, and stopping on an isolated road places the Samaritan himself in danger. He then accepts physical contact. The man is stripped, bleeding, and severely injured. Helping him will be unpleasant and messy, but the Samaritan places his own hands upon the wounds of a stranger.



He also uses his own provisions, “pouring on oil and wine” (Luke 10:34). Wine could be used to cleanse a wound, while oil could soothe and protect injured tissue.

They are practical resources the Samaritan possesses and is willing to expend. Perhaps they were provisions for his journey or merchandise he planned to sell in Jericho. Jesus does not say. Whatever their intended purpose, they are now used for the wounded man.

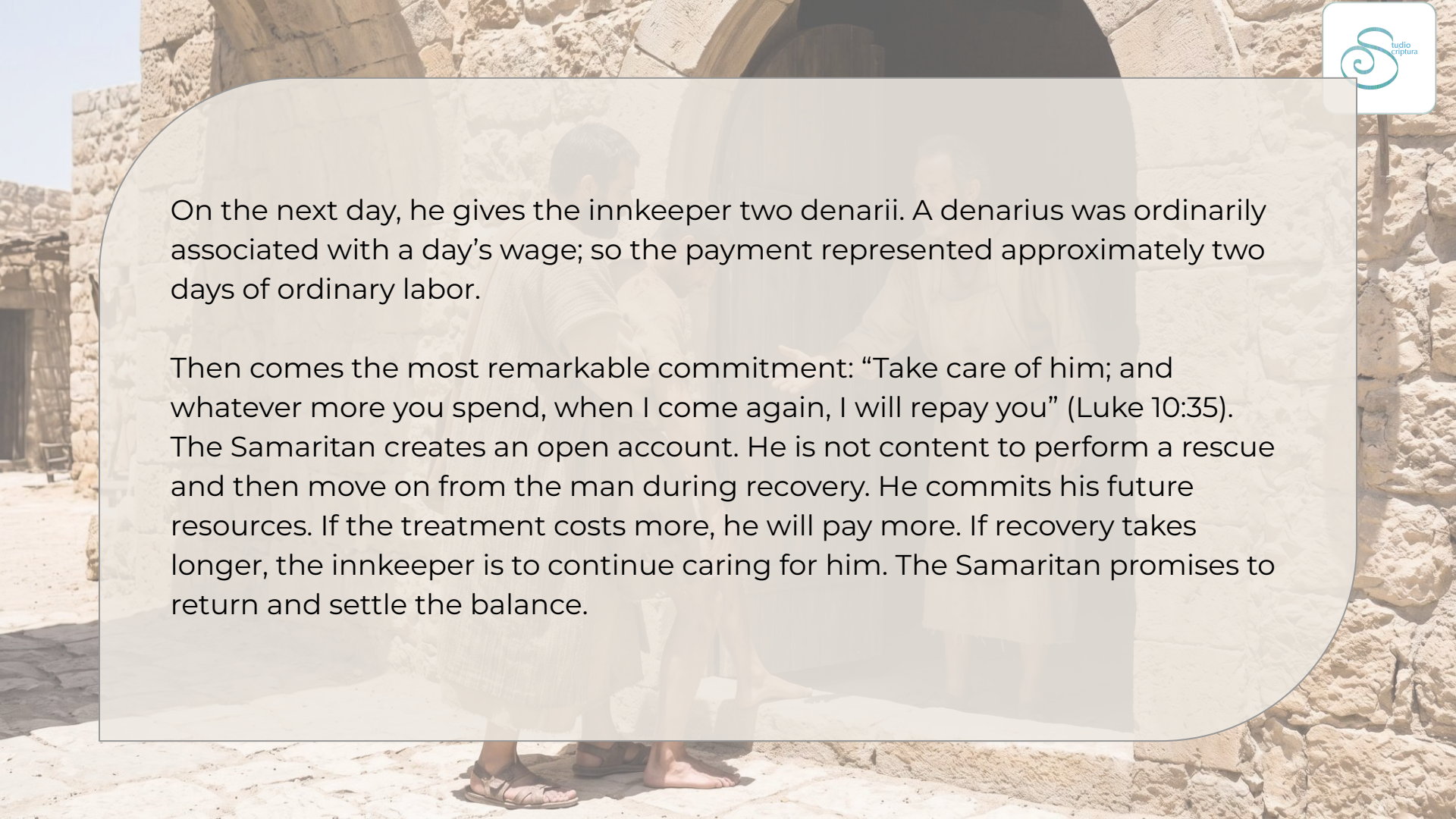
Compassion changes what the Samaritan does with his resources.



The Samaritan then sets the wounded man on his own animal. That means the wounded man rides while the Samaritan walks. In modern terms, he places a bleeding stranger into the back seat of the car he just had detailed.

He brings the man to an inn and personally takes care of him. He does not simply leave him at the door and continue with his journey. The reference to “the next day” indicates that he remains with the man overnight. Mercy touches not only his wallet but also his calendar.

The Samaritan had somewhere to go and something to do, but compassion interrupted his itinerary.



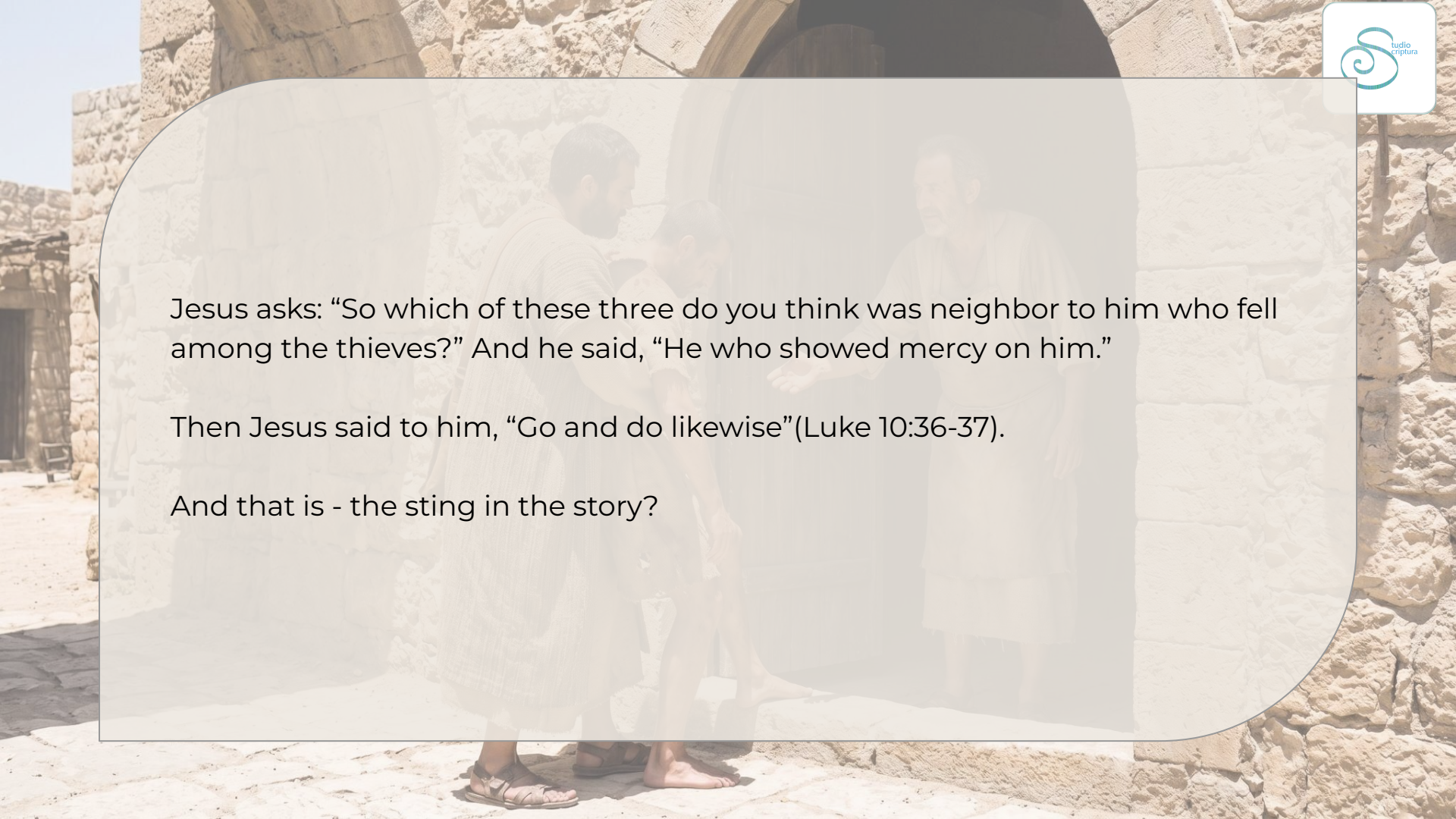
On the next day, he gives the innkeeper two denarii. A denarius was ordinarily associated with a day's wage; so the payment represented approximately two days of ordinary labor.

Then comes the most remarkable commitment: "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you" (Luke 10:35). The Samaritan creates an open account. He is not content to perform a rescue and then move on from the man during recovery. He commits his future resources. If the treatment costs more, he will pay more. If recovery takes longer, the innkeeper is to continue caring for him. The Samaritan promises to return and settle the balance.



The Samaritan uses his resources and standing for the benefit and well-being of someone else.

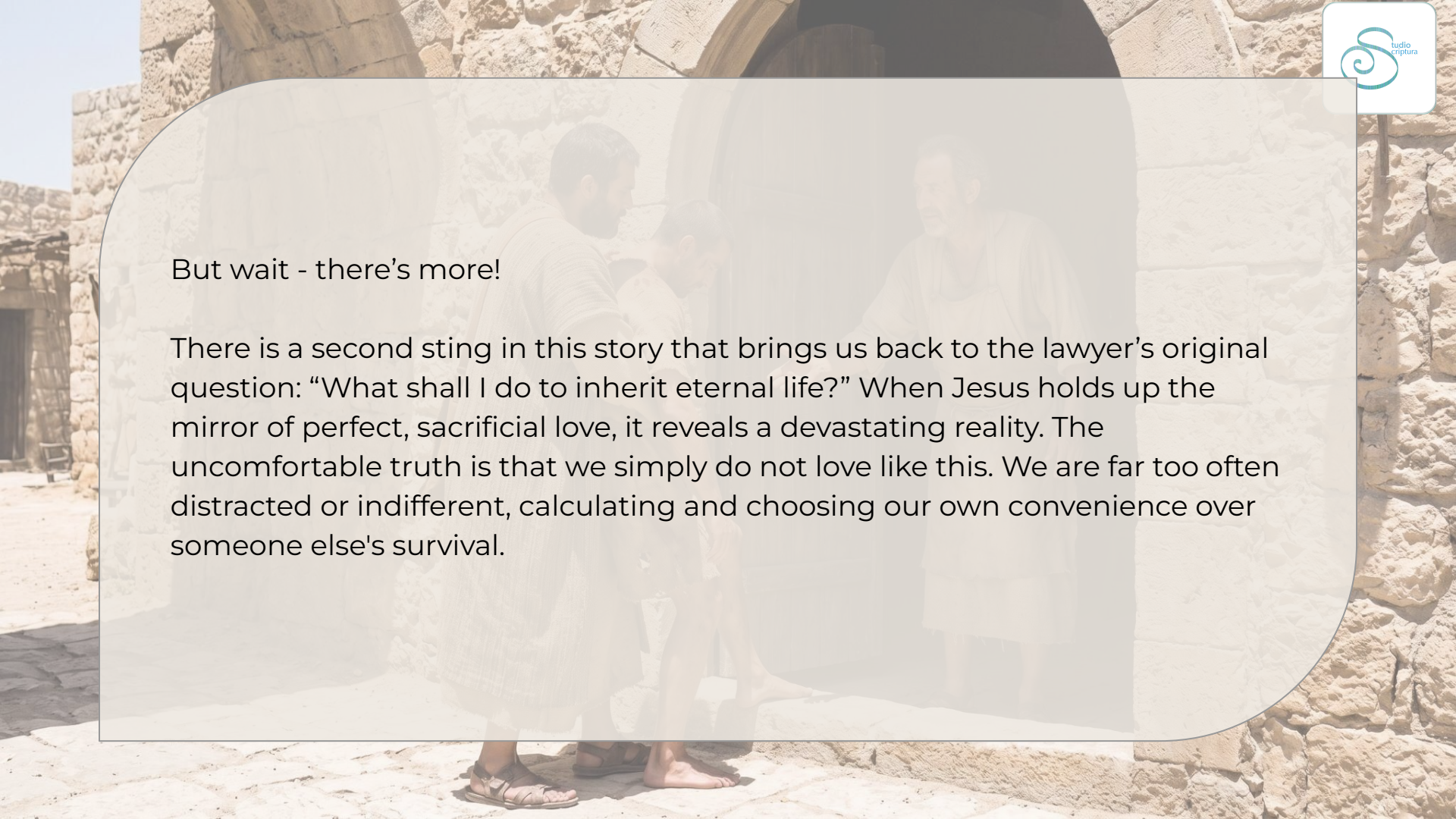
Where do we possess standing? Where does our name open a door or two? Where does our professional position carry influence? Where can our reputation, expertise, relationship, or just our time provide help for someone who could not obtain it for themselves?



Jesus asks: “So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?” And he said, “He who showed mercy on him.”

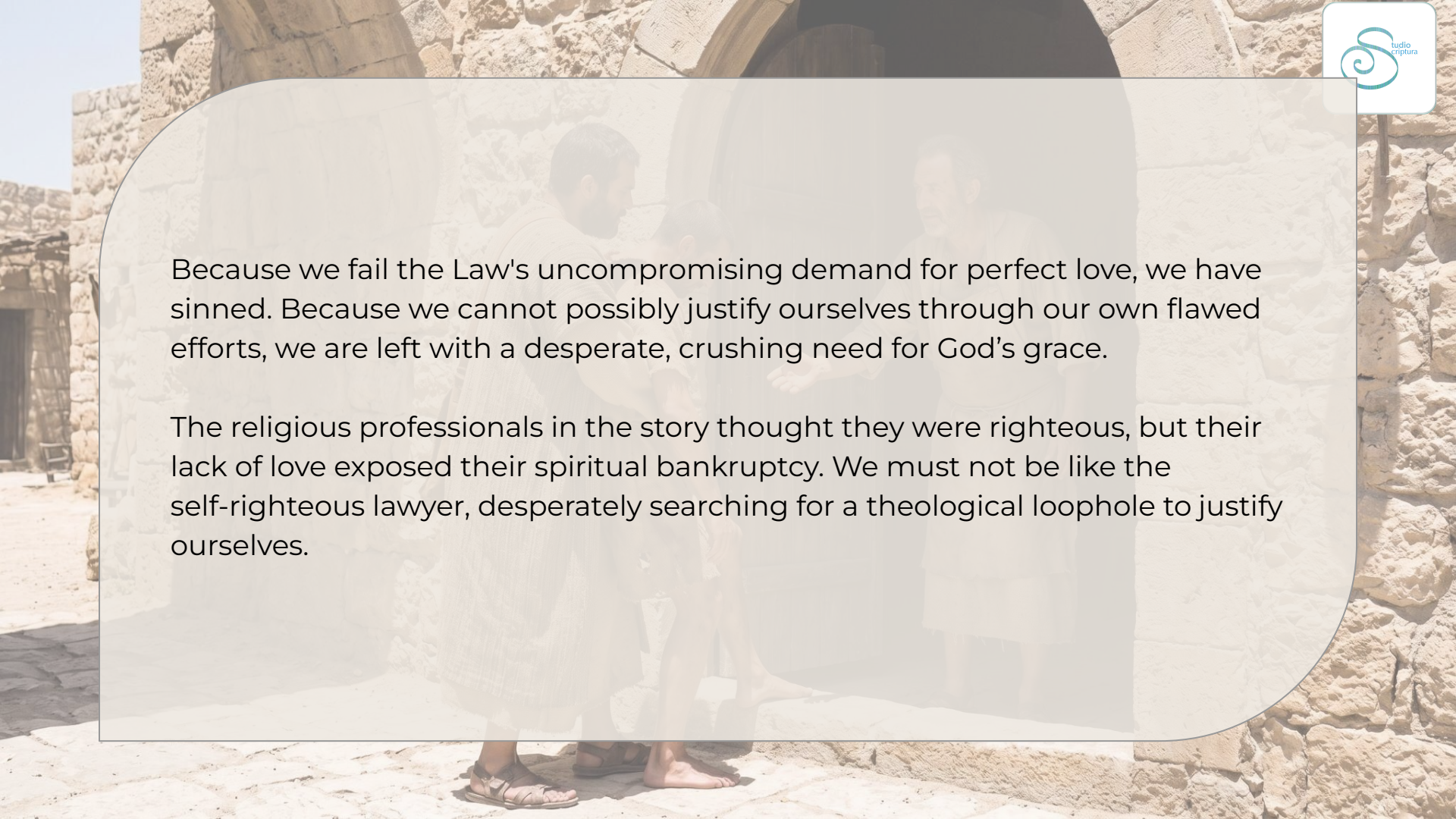
Then Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise”(Luke 10:36-37).

And that is - the sting in the story?



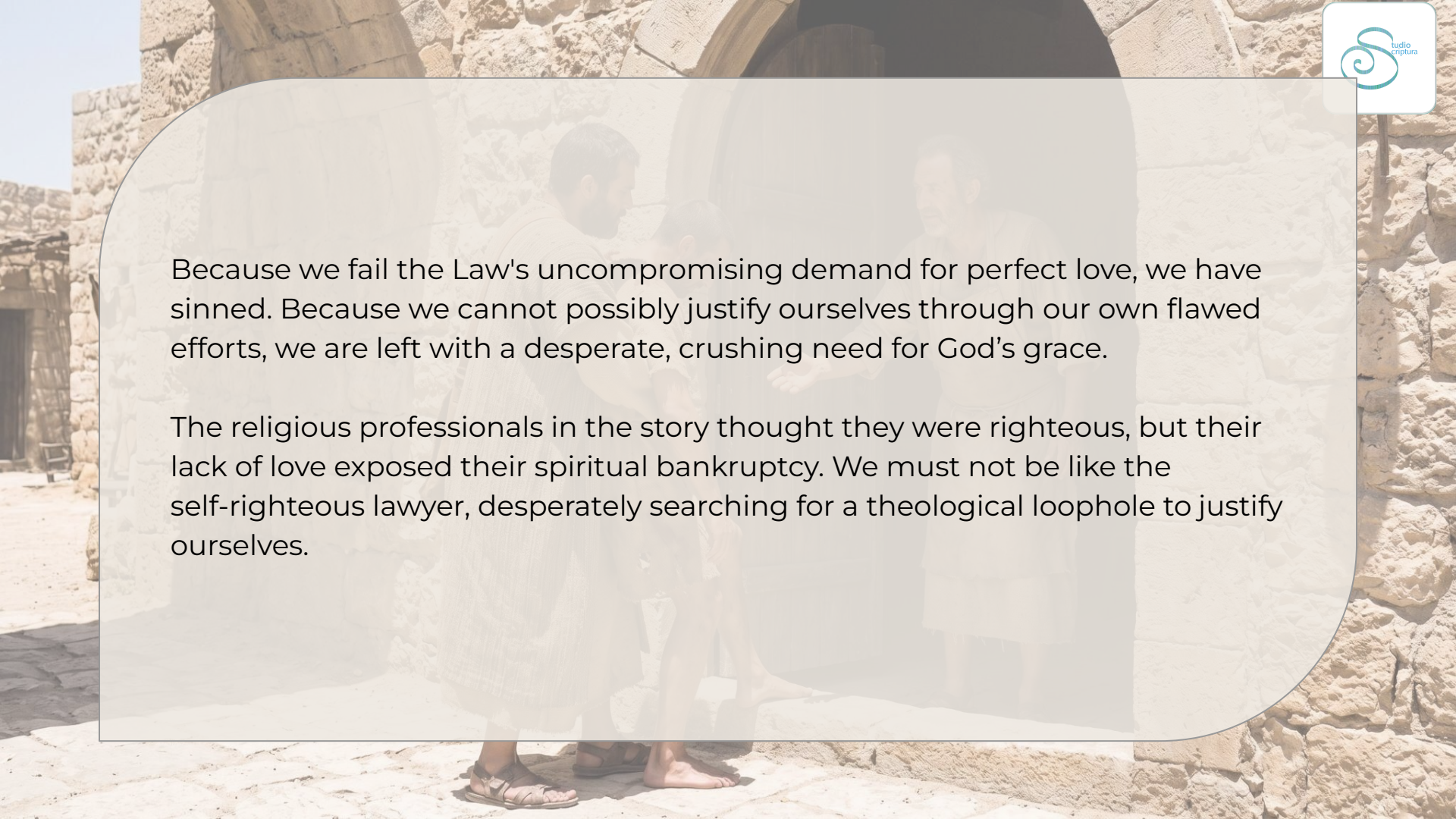
But wait - there’s more!

There is a second sting in this story that brings us back to the lawyer’s original question: “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” When Jesus holds up the mirror of perfect, sacrificial love, it reveals a devastating reality. The uncomfortable truth is that we simply do not love like this. We are far too often distracted or indifferent, calculating and choosing our own convenience over someone else's survival.



Because we fail the Law's uncompromising demand for perfect love, we have sinned. Because we cannot possibly justify ourselves through our own flawed efforts, we are left with a desperate, crushing need for God’s grace.

The religious professionals in the story thought they were righteous, but their lack of love exposed their spiritual bankruptcy. We must not be like the self-righteous lawyer, desperately searching for a theological loophole to justify ourselves.



Because we fail the Law's uncompromising demand for perfect love, we have sinned. Because we cannot possibly justify ourselves through our own flawed efforts, we are left with a desperate, crushing need for God’s grace.

The religious professionals in the story thought they were righteous, but their lack of love exposed their spiritual bankruptcy. We must not be like the self-righteous lawyer, desperately searching for a theological loophole to justify ourselves.



We have now heard the parable in its original setting. Let us place something like it on a road familiar to us.

Imagine a blistering-hot Sunday afternoon on a stretch of a highway. A Christian family is stranded on the side of the road.

Their car has developed obvious mechanical trouble and has limped to the side of the highway; inside is a family of four.

On the back bumper, two stickers are prominently displayed: a Christian fish symbol and a bright decal reading, *Born Again*!



The father is sweating and increasingly stressed, while his wife and children are trying to remain somewhat cool inside the vehicle. You can see the worry on his wife's face.

In the distance, a sedan approaches. The driver is a well-known preacher scheduled to be the keynote speaker at a large Sunday evening service. As he draws near, he sees the stranded family and the Christian bumper stickers. He feels a twinge of guilt but then glances at the clock on his dashboard. "If I stop, I may miss the service."



He offers a quick prayer for their safety, presses the accelerator slightly so that he will not make eye contact, and continues down the highway.

Twenty minutes later, another vehicle approaches. Behind the wheel is a respected church elder, a man known for his stellar Reformed theology. He is on his way to an important elders' meeting. He sees the stranded family and slows just enough to assess the situation.



“I will call the highway patrol as soon as I get a signal. Or perhaps I should call from the church parking lot. I shouldn’t be handling my iPhone while driving.”

The signal does not connect. His mind soon returns to his meeting, and he forgets to make the call.

Another hour passes and the heat of the day continues to hang in the air.



Then a beautifully detailed black Cadillac Escalade pulls off the highway and onto the shoulder. The family hears the distinct crunch of its thick tires slowly rolling across the gravel as the vehicle eases to a stop.

The door opens, and out steps a well-known liberal attorney who is currently making national headlines for pursuing social and moral issues on the opposite side of conservative Christian positions.



As he walks toward the minivan, there is no hesitation. In a cheerful voice that cuts directly through the anxiety of the day, he calls out, “Well, it looks as though you folks have had, and are still having, a miserable afternoon!”

He looks into the car, and the wife already begins to smile with a bit of relief. “Let’s get you all out of this heat.”



He loads the entire sweaty group into the back seats of his air-conditioned Escalade. He calls an auto repair shop, and the family hears his voice rise: “No, you don’t understand. Do you know how much business my firm does with you people? I need that tow truck here now. And I need the car repaired in two days! Is that clear enough?”

He lowers the phone, looks at the father, and says with a smile, “I hope I was clear with them.”



He drives the family to a Marriott two exits down, walks to the front desk, and places his Platinum American Express card on the counter.

“I want you to put them in a nice room. Cover their meals as well. Keep everything on my card. I will be driving back through in about two days, and I will settle the entire balance then.”

He turns to the stunned Christian father, shakes his hand, gives him a business card, wishes the family well, and drives away.



Then comes the question Jesus asked:

Which of these three proved to be a neighbor to this man and his family?

And the question that started this whole story - *What I must do to inherit eternal life?*

Because we repeatedly fall short of the standard of this kind of love - we need a Saviour to inherit eternal life!

This class was prepared through personal study of Scripture and careful engagement with trusted scholarship on the Gospels. Generative AI tools were used to assist with research, organization, and the drafting of phrasing. All final interpretations, judgments, and content reflect the author’s convictions.