

“THE PARABLE OF THE FORGIVING FATHER.”

First Christian Reformed Church

June 16, 2013, 10:30AM

Scripture Texts: Luke 15:11-32

Introduction.

This summer we are looking at 12 parables of Jesus. This morning we come to one of the most well-known and best loved of Jesus' parables, often called the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Luke 15 begins:

Luke 15:1-2 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

The religious leaders, the elders found fault with Jesus and murmured and grumbled against Him because of the kind of people He hung out with. They accused Him of being a friend of sinners.

Jesus answered the charge by telling three parables, the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin and the parable of the lost son. All three have something being lost and then something being found and then great joy over the lost being found and a party.

The parable of the lost son is pretty simple and straight forward, there are three people, a prodigal son, a forgiving father and an older brother. Let's consider each in turn.

The Prodigal Son.

The sinner.

The prodigal son represents all sinners. He is the poster child of sinners. He is the definition of a sinner. He is someone who takes what belongs to God and what is given to him by God and following the natural inclination of his own heart runs as far away from God as he can.

This is us, this is our likeness. We are naturally bent to do whatever seems good to us, whatever brings us the most happiness or pleasure. We want to live for ourselves and have as little to do with God as possible.

Everyone did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25) and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord (Judges 2:11).

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way.

This folly is repeated by many men and women young and old today. They throw off all restraint and run after this world's pleasures following whatever lusts or urges they give way to.

The sinner's plight.

Jesus next shows us the true condition of every sinner. Running away from God always starts out feeling very free but it always ends feeling miserable and lost. Sin is always folly and it always leads to misery, sooner or later.

Their consciences betray them, they have no true peace, there's a famine in their souls. Sin is a terrible master.

Jesus paints the picture in the most vivid of terms to show how deep the depths of sin are. In a Jewish context nothing could be worse than having to be among unclean animals and pigs are the worst. This man has fallen into the deepest and darkest pit of iniquity.

The sinner's penitence, he came to himself, came to his senses.

God in His mercy sends a wakeup call, a harsh dose of reality, he began to be in great need and no one gave him any help.

He came to his senses. There was no way out of his mess until he faced the reality of the mess he was in. We don't leave our sin until we have a clear sense of the guilt and shame and misery of it. Maybe a run in with authorities or trouble in a relationship or a medical or financial crisis.

Countless millions know the freedom of being able to say, "I am a sinner, I have sinned against God and deserve nothing, but I will flee to Him and beg for mercy."

He leaves the far country, he stops running and begins returning. What a picture of conversion, of true repentance and faith. This is a man in whom the Spirit is working opening his blind eyes, quickening his conscience, enlightening his understanding, giving him the courage of will to confess his iniquities.

No blaming, no excuses, total ownership and responsibility. He breaks off his association with his sin, with his past way of life, he turns from it. Repentance accompanied with action. Repentance is a most important first step but it must be followed with a hatred of our sin and a turning away from it. His words are exactly right and so are his actions.

"Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."

Repentance has these elements.

Honestly owning up to the reality of the misery of sin calling it what it really is.
Humbly realizing our own sense of worthlessness and unworthiness before God.
Casting ourselves on the mercy of God and His free grace acknowledging we are dead and we need a resurrection, something only God can do.
Seeing that what God has to offer is better than anything in this world. Even the crumbs from His table are better than the very best pleasures of this life.

Some people would rather just feel bad than change. Godly grief mobilizes us for action. Godly grief brings us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, brings us to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives and to be zealous for good works (Titus 2:12, 14).

The Forgiving Father, the sinners pardon.

Jesus paints an incredible picture of a father's lavish love for his sinful son.

The father sees him while he is still far off, before anyone else sees him. God sees the slightest stirrings in our souls.

The father has compassion on him, a flood of emotion.

The father doesn't walk, he doesn't send a servant, he throws off all decorum and runs to him.

The father embraces him and kisses him. It wouldn't take much for you to imagine how you would feel if a particular person in your life came home or came to faith or came out of their darkness. Now try to imagine that is how God is with us.

The father lavishes on the son all the symbols of family, of being truly home.

The father kills the special fatted calf. This calls for celebration.

What a picture of God's grace and mercy and love. To all who truly repent He holds out His forgiveness and love. A free and full pardon awaits any and all who hate their sin and renounce it and turn from it.

Notice the father's words. "My son was dead and is alive again." Another definition of a sinner and the life of a sinner. As Paul says, "We were dead in the trespasses and sins in which we once walked" (Ephesians 2:1).

But because all the wrath of God toward sin was poured out on Jesus, He is no longer angry with us. When a sinner comes home, it's cause for joy. The lost is found, the dead is alive, the prodigal is home. There is joy in the father's house.

The Other Brother, *The other sinner, the other prodigal.*

This is a picture of the Pharisees and their self-righteousness toward sinners. And this is a picture of many Christians who have been in the church a long time and who feel superior.

It's true the Jews could not bear the thought of a Gentile repenting and being given their inheritance. Would we begrudge a black man, a poor man, a handicapped, a former prostitute, a Muslim convert becoming a member of our church?

Is there anyone who repents who should be excluded from God's favor, who we would not accept as a fellow heir of God's grace?

Since the majority of us are not in the category of the first son let me give ten tests to see if we are an older brother kind of person. (Outline from pastor Glen Scrivener).

First, you are near the father's house, you are in the church.

You have the blessings and benefits. You aren't far away completely ignoring the things of God. But you are still outside on the porch refusing to come all the way in.

Second, there is anger inside you that at surprising times flares up.

You are a nice Christian so you know you have to keep a lid on it but once in a while it erupts. If you are really good at stuffing it, it might show up as depression or bitterness or lack of compassion. But there is an internal anger.

Third, you are self-promoting.

“Look at all I have done for you, look at all the sacrifices I’ve made, look at all the hours I’ve worked, at all the overtime, how I never took off to play with my friends. Look at all the committee work I did and all the church services I attended. Look at how much I gave, even to the building fund. And did you notice how obedient I was, never sinning like that son of yours or all those other people.”

You care about appearances and achievement. You really do think your good works gain you favor with God. You drop hints of how good you are or what you did for someone else.

Fourth, your Christian life feels like duty to you, like a mild kind of slavery.

It’s drudgery, lots of rules, do’s and don’ts, very little joy.

We dishonor God when we think of our service as slavery or bondage. We dishonor God when He just see Him as a master who issues commands and makes demands. We honor God when we see ourselves as His children, His sons and daughters, who live in His house and depend on Him and delight to do His will.

Fifth, you can’t admit to your sin.

You think you are basically pretty good and don’t sin much, at least none of the big ones. You think you are better than most people. You don’t like when the preacher gets personal and points out how much of our sin is self and selfish and self-righteous.

You don’t see your own unworthiness to be in the father’s house. You don’t know what you have been forgiven of, let alone how much.

Sixth, you don’t allow yourself too much joy.

You don’t want to let yourself go too much when it comes to celebrating who God is and what He has done for you.

There should be heartfelt joy over any sinner repenting. Is one who was lost, found? Is a dead soul made alive? Is someone a new creature in Jesus Christ? Salvation should be the source of the deepest joy in each of our hearts.

Seventh, you think God is unfair with you.

Do you ever think you aren’t being treated by God as you really deserve? Do you ever think your other brother is getting more blessings or God is showing him more kindness?

If we ever begrudge God’s grace generously given to another, we show that we don’t have a clue how much we ourselves have received.

Eighth, you avoid associating with sinners.

Would you feel uncomfortable doing a mission project for the homeless or an outreach to drug addicts or visiting prisons or serving at a soup kitchen?

The Pharisees had a problem with that. And the son accuses the father of as much. He has killed the fatted calf and is eating with the younger son.

Ninth, you look down on others and feel superior to them.

Do you ever think to yourself, “I thank God I am not like that person”? Or are you actually able to say to yourself, “There but for the grace of God go I.”

Tenth, you don’t realize how much grace God has given you and how much love He has shown you.

You need to come to your senses and realize how much of a sinner you are and how great a grace has been given to you and how big an inheritance you have. And all of this should be cause to celebrate.

Application and Conclusion.

Jesus tells the Pharisees He is guilty as charged. He didn’t just receive sinners and tax collections, He eagerly expected and waited for them. In fact He seeks them. What a Savior, what a friend of sinners.

God saw our greatest need was our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death, and He sent us a the one thing we needed most, a Savior.

Salvation is God’s deliverance from our misery whether it’s the misery of our sin or our self-righteousness. Salvation glorifies His mercy and forgiveness. It reveals His love and it brings Him great joy.

John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Pray for prodigals because it is the Fathers joy to bring them home. Pray for prodigals from home, prodigals from faith. Pray for prodigals like Muslims, after all Ishmael was Abraham’s son. Pray for all the older brothers that fill our churches that they too will see their own sins and that their hard hearts will become tender and turn to the Father and come off the porch and come inside to celebrate with joy. He’s a prodigal on the porch rather than in a far country.

Fathers, hold out to your children this picture of grace. Call them by your words and your example to a life of repentance and true joy in God’s forgiveness. Show them the path of confession and forgiveness and celebrate it. Show yourselves to be humble before God. Where there is sin let there also be quick repentance.

One of the greatest influences in our world is a father’s faith, a father’s example, a father’s prayers. Men, don’t grow weary but persevere to the end and you will reap a father’s reward, which will be great joy over the salvation of your children (I John 1:4).

May all of us who were once dead and are now alive, know the joy of our salvation and rejoice over the salvation of all who repent.