

## “The Waiting Father”—Luke 15:18-20

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Waiting Father”, is Luke 15:18-20 → The son said: *I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “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.”* And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

I’ve heard it said that experience is the best teacher. College graduates discover the importance of experience after heading out into the “real world” of their careers. There is much they encounter which their philosophical academia cannot provide as they begin learning in “the school of hard knocks.” Employers recognize the value of experience, so much so that many college graduates have a difficult time breaking into their careers without it. Maturity with it’s experience of life is one characteristic which should bring respect for those who are much older. In fact, many times a parent will need to trust the benefits of experience over the babbling of the lecture, difficult as

it may be, to help his child learn.

Apparently we encounter just such a father in our text with Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. What prompted Jesus tell this parable in the first place? According to Luke 15:2 Jesus was criticized by *the Pharisees and the scribes* who *grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."* It was Jesus' way of revealing to these religious leaders that their perception of themselves as *righteous persons who need no repentance* (cf. Luke 15:7) was false. They too were sinners who needed to repent because they lived in self-righteousness.

The parable describes two sons whose actions depict two extremes. The younger son is lost in his sin expressed by his living only to gratify the desires of his sinful flesh. This is most obvious in the descriptions of him leaving home to squander *his property in reckless living* and prostitution. (cf. Luke 15:13,30). He would be considered by most people to be a terrible sinner. The older son is lost in his sin as seen by his self-righteous attitude of feeling he deserved the favor of his father. Refusing to enter the welcome home celebration for his brother, he told his father in Luke 15:29-30 → *Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened*

*calf for him!*

His attitude would be considered by most people to be the most logical. Think about it. Have you ever been frustrated when one of your siblings received so much attention because s/he was constantly rebelling against the rules, getting into trouble and causing so much grief in the family? The older son in the parable does have a point. It appears like dad was rejoicing over such sinful behavior and even rewarding his brother for it! It just doesn't make sense! What experience would he need to see his self-righteous attitude in it all because he thinks he has ***never disobeyed*** his father's *commands*? Never?

It is the same focus for many who read this parable and rightly so. It is proper to focus on this sinful son who came to the point of contrition and repentance in his life and went back to his father in humility. His "confession" of sinning *against heaven and before* his father, along with his feeling that he *was no longer worthy to be called his son* (cf. Verses 18-19), is reminiscent of Psalm 51:4 where King David prayed to the LORD: *Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight, so that You may be justified in Your words and blameless in Your judgment.* It reflects true contrition.

Contrition is sorrow or grief over your sins. It is necessary in order to confess your sins properly. 2 Corinthians 7:10 speaks about two types of

contrition: godly sorrow and worldly sorrow. *Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.* *Worldly grief* is being sorry for your sin only because of human factors, such as getting caught or seeing the hurt and pain you've caused someone. It *produces death* because it produces punishment instead of forgiveness. We have a good example of such *worldly grief* in Judas. Matthew 27:3-5 says *when Judas, who betrayed Jesus, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself.*

The reason *godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret* is because it brings the complete forgiveness of sins in the punishment and death of Jesus for you. It actually restores relationships rather than simply redefines them. Notice it is the son's *godly grief* and his restored relationship with God the Father in heaven over which his father rejoiced, not simply joy because his son finally returned home. *This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.* (cf. Luke 15:24)

However, maybe the focus of the parable should be on the father. Verse

20 of our text gives us the picture of this father waiting expectantly for his wayward son to come home again. It says: *While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him*, even without knowing if he was going to be repentant. This father's love for both of his sinful sons was so strong that no sin of rebelliousness or self-righteousness changed it. His love was way ahead of this rebellious son so he made the initiative to express that love. Both sons displayed that they were sinners in need of forgiveness and he loved them.

The parable reveals the loving patience and forgiveness of our heavenly Father Who is waiting for all people to come to Him to receive the forgiveness of their sins! It is a forgiveness accomplished in the death of Jesus Who paid the punishment for our sins with His blood on the cross. This is why Jesus said in John 6:37 → *All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out*. The response of the father in the parable shows his total and complete acceptance of his repentant son. Maybe the parable should be referred to as the parable of the waiting father instead.

The point of Jesus' parable is that all people, both those "terrible sinners" and those self-righteous people, are accepted by God our Father when they come to Him in humble contrition, repentance and faith in Jesus! By the way, it is too easy to read this parable, think of the other people we know and strive

to figure out which son they represent. When that happens we miss the point because **each of us are the “terrible sinners” who also act self-righteously much of the time.** Unfortunately the sinful tendency is to live in two extremes: refusing to come before God as a sinner in contrition and repentance and coming to Him with a self-righteous attitude thinking we deserve His forgiveness. Romans 3:22-24 says *there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* We all need to be justified by the grace provided *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus* as our loving Father waits patiently for us to come to Him in humility, contrition and repentance.

While no one has experienced a good enough life to earn the acceptance of God, no one has experienced too much of a sinful life that God cannot forgive him in Christ! God is waiting with open arms to forgive! Let's not keep Him waiting but constantly come to Him in humble repentance, receive His complete forgiveness in Christ and rejoice when others do the same! He is our waiting Father. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Unless otherwise indicated, all scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.