

God Forgives Even the Righteous

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Luke 15:11-32

Our text this morning is a parable which is often given the label the prodigal son. This title puts the emphasis on the relationship between the father and the younger son. However, we should not underestimate the importance of the elder son, and his relationship with the father. The greatness of the Father's love and patience is seen just as much with the elder son as it is with the younger. So we consider this morning that God forgives even the righteous.

V11-13 11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. 12 "And the younger of them said to his father, `Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. 13 "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

From the very beginning of this parable the sinfulness of both sons and the faithful patience and love of the father is clearly seen.

Imagine saying to your father, "I don't care that you are still alive. I want you to divide up everything that you own so that I can have my inheritance now and get away from you." The younger son's request is impertinent and sinful. The elder son is not much better. He goes along with this impertinent request accepting his inheritance from the father. As shocking as is the attitude of the sons, the father's response is even more shocking in his patience and forbearance. The father goes along with this scheme. He does not punish his sons as they deserve but allows them to choose this sinful path, hoping that they will learn and repent.

Isaiah 48:9 9 "For My name's sake I will defer My anger, And for My praise I will restrain it from you, So that I do not cut you off.

The Father is patient with us in our sinfulness. When we take his gifts and waste them in sinful living, he does not strike us down. His desire is not to deal with us as we deserve. He is calling us to repent that he might show us his mercy and not his judgement.

V14-17 14 "But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. 15 "Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 "And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. 17 "But when he came to himself, he said, ` How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

When he came to himself, that is he recognized the deplorable state that he was in, then he remembered how good he had in his father's house.

This young man can't wait to get away from his father and out on his own. He was not thankful nor appreciative of all that he had. The only thing he cares about is the "fun" that he sees others having in the world around him. Once again, the sin of the younger is clear, but the elder isn't without fault. The elder son we will learn shortly also has the same attitude. Even though he stays and does not waste his inheritance, he is jealous of the younger son. He reveals his own sinful desire to live like the sinful world.

We too fail to appreciate what we have from God. We long to live like our neighbors, doing what we want and not answerable to anyone. God who is rich in mercy, is waiting for us to come to our senses and realize his goodness.

Peter reminds us to consider that:

2 Peter 3:15 the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation-

When we come to our senses and realize that living in sin is not the joyful party, we thought it to be, God is waiting for us to return that he might restore to us the riches of his grace.

V18-24 18 ` I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, 19 "and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." 20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 "And the son said to him, ` Father, I have sinned

against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, `Bring1 out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 ` And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24 ` for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry

The attitude of the son is one that we and the world often see as indicative of true repentance. He is sorry for his sin, and he tries to make up for it in some way. The younger son is truly remorseful and contrite, but he lacks faith. He understands his sin, but he doesn't understand the Father's grace and mercy.

The father's response is immediate. He makes it clear that there is no need to attempt to make up for his sin. His son has come back, and the father restores him immediately and fully to what he was before a true son of God.

This failure to understand that God's love does not require us to make up for our sin, is prevalent not only in the world but also in Christianity. The Catholics to be sure failed to grasp this point. They insist that you must do something to make up for your sin. There are all kinds of things they claim you can do, from repeating the Hail Mary, to giving money, to a thousand years in purgatory. They are not alone, Baptists, evangelicals, puritans, and even Lutherans make this same mistake. We often believe that we have to do something to make up for our sins. But the Father's response is to wave it all away. To the younger son and to us as well the Father says, "the sin is gone think of it no more."

How is such a thing possible? Paul reminds us in our epistle reading: **"For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us."**

This is a truth that is grasped and held by faith. Without this word of God, it would be presumptuous for us to believe that we do not have to do anything to make up for our sins. By faith we can return to the father trusting that in this way he deals with us. This is how great the father's love and mercy is, that his forgiveness through Jesus Christ is absolute. He requires nothing from you.

As the Lord proclaims through Isaiah:

Isa 43:25 "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins.

V25-32 25 "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 "So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 "And he said to him, `Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' 28 "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. 29 "So he answered and said to his father, `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. 30 ` But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' 31 "And he said to him, `Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. 32 ` It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'

The father forgives the younger son, but the elder brother refuses to accept it. The elder insists that rather than a party the younger son should do penance.

The sin of the younger was not against the elder. The elder son participated in the sin of the younger. If the father wishes to forgive and forget, what right does the elder have to hold it against the younger,?

We often have the same attitude towards one another. We insist on demanding that others make up for their sin, even though we know that God has forgiven them in Christ Jesus.

Listen to what Paul wrote in our epistle reading

2 Corinthians 5:16-17 16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. **17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.**

In these verses Paul pleads with us to see our brother the way that God sees him. He reminds us to view one another with the same love which the Father shows to both brothers in this parable. We are called not to look on one another according to the flesh. By this Paul means that we should not see them with regard to those sins which we think they have done. Instead, we are to look on one another through Christ as God looks on us. God

does not count their sins, but rather they are new creations in Christ. Each one of us has been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

God desire us to learn this love **not** for the sake of our brother. Our brother does not need our forgiveness. He has been forgiven by Christ. He is inside the grace and love of God. God wants us to forgive for our sake. When we refuse to forgive, we are the ones standing out in the cold, missing out on the party. We believe that we are right to demand that our brother pay for what he did, but the only ones we are hurting with such an attitude are ourselves.

Paul reminds us that God has "**given us the ministry of reconciliation.**" The Greek word translated "given" means to put or place. The word translated ministry means to serve, like a waiter brings food to a table. Thus, what Paul is saying is that God has "put inside us the ability to serve to one another the reconciliation which Christ has given to us." We have the opportunity to share the truth of Christ's forgiveness and to share by forgiving one another.

This is not an odious service which God has called us to. This is a joyful service, to participate in this party which God throws, to participate and share the love of God which forgives without requiring anything in return. To learn to love and forgive as God has forgiven us is the greatest joy we can have on this earth.

We often stress the sinful living of the younger brother to show how great the mercy of God is. It is not the *younger* who pushes the Father's mercy and patience to the greatest limit but the *elder*. What manner of love God has shown to him and to us. The father leaves the party, to call the elder to repentance. God is the good shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep. In this case the lost sheep is the elder brother.

God is more patient and loving with us than we can possibly imagine. He has forgiven all our sins. He forgives both those who live in sin and those who have trouble forgiving.