

God's Promise of Forgiveness to the Penitent

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Sermon Grace, Sin and Transformation Not stated

Luke 15:1-2 (quoted)

Luke 15:7 (quoted)

Luke 15:11-32 (quoted)

Psalm 51:17 (quoted)

Friends in Christ, today we reflect on the profound theme of God's promise of forgiveness to the penitent. This truth is rooted in the heart of our faith, and is beautifully illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son, found in Luke 15:1-2 and 11-32. In a world filled with struggle, regret, and the burden of sin, we are reminded of God's boundless grace and mercy.

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. (Luke 15:1-2, KJV)

In this chapter, we see the Pharisees and scribes criticising Jesus for welcoming sinners and eating with them. Jesus responds, not with rebuke, but with a story that reveals the very heart of God towards the lost. The parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the best loved in Scripture, and shows us that no one is beyond the reach of God's forgiveness, and no sin too great to be forgiven.

The story begins with a young man who demands his inheritance from his father, a sign of deep disrespect. He leaves home and squanders his fortune on reckless living.

And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. (Luke 15:11-16, KJV)

Here we see the allure of sin and its consequences. The prodigal finds himself in dire straits, working in a foreign land, feeding pigs, longing to fill his stomach with their food — a powerful picture of how sin leads

to spiritual and emotional poverty. As we reflect on this, we recognise that many of us have known moments of regret or poor choices in our own lives. We may have wandered far from God, seeking fulfilment in the desires of this world. But even at our lowest points, God's presence is near, waiting to welcome us home.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. (Luke 15:17-19, KJV)

In the depths of despair, the prodigal son comes to his senses. He remembers his father, and the abundance of food even his father's servants enjoy. This remembrance leads him to repentance: he decides to return home, prepared to confess his sin. Repentance is not merely recognising our mistakes; it is a heartfelt turning away from sin and back to God. This change of heart is vital, for God's forgiveness is promised to those who genuinely seek Him with a contrite spirit.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. (Psalm 51:17, KJV)

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. (Luke 15:20-24, KJV)

As the prodigal approaches home, his father sees him from a distance — a moment that shows the father's longing and love for his son. Instead of waiting with disappointment, the father runs to him, embraces him, and kisses him: a beautiful picture of God's own heart towards us, merciful, loving, and ready to forgive. His response is immediate; he reinstates the son as his own, calling for the best robe, a ring, and sandals. The feast represents celebration and restoration, and is a vivid reminder that when we come to God with a repentant heart, He welcomes us back with open arms, offering forgiveness and full restoration.

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh

to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. (Luke 15:25-32, KJV)

The story does not end there. The elder son, who had remained faithful and obedient, becomes angry and resentful; he cannot understand why there should be such a celebration for his wayward brother. This part of the parable reminds us that God's grace can be hard to accept for those who think they have earned His favour through their own works. The father lovingly explains that everything he has is also the elder son's own. The emphasis is on love and grace, not works; our relationship with God is not based on our merit, but on His unmerited favour.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. (Luke 15:7, KJV)

As we reflect on this parable, we are reminded that God eagerly awaits the return of the penitent, and surpasses our expectations with His love and grace. May we all take comfort in the promise of forgiveness that God extends to us, regardless of our past mistakes. Let us also strive to emulate the father's heart, extending grace to those around us, rejoicing in the redemption of others, and letting go of resentment.

As we leave today, I encourage you to reflect on your own journey. Are there areas in your life where you need to repent and return to the Father? Know that His arms are wide open, ready to receive you. Let us embrace His promise of forgiveness, and share that same love and grace with others.

Amen.

