

Have You Earned God's Love?

Sunday, March 31 – 8:00 & 10:45

Fourth Sunday in Lent – 2019

Wednesdays of Lent: Services at 11 & 7; Meals at 12 & 6

Introduction: Dear friends: Think about yourself... would you agree that you ♦are basically good, ♦haven't done anything terribly wrong, and ♦feel – to some extent – that you deserve God's love? Such thinking is common, *BUT UNTRUE!*

1. **The Setting:** ¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear [Jesus]. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable: ... // Actually Jesus told three parables – *The Lost Sheep*, *The Lost Coin*, and, today's focus, *The Two Lost Sons* (or *The Prodigal Son*). Dr. Kretzmann wrote: "The Lord here exhibits the unspeakable riches of His merciful love to all men, *but especially to those that feel the need of that mercy*" (348). In regard to all three parables, think about Jesus' audience: Some knew they DID NOT deserve God's love – *like the tax collectors and sinners*, and some thought they DID – *like the Pharisees and scribes*. In all three parables, ♦EVERYONE is important and ♦EVERYONE is shown God's undeserved love! Now Parable 3: ¹¹ And [Jesus] said, "There was a man who had two sons.

2. **The Sinful Younger Son:**

a. His sin: ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me [my inheritance].' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he

squandered his property in reckless [wasteful] living. //

Even though we are shocked that the younger son demanded his inheritance: “It has been custom in the Orient... for sons to demand and receive their portion of the inheritance during their father’s lifetime... So the father... divided his entire living... the older probably receiving the home place, and the younger, money (350). So money in hand, the younger son went far away – *wasting all of his money to satisfy his own desires!* “That is a picture of a person that has grown up... in the midst of the Christian congregation, but does not realize the greatness of the blessings which attend him there. He turns his back to the Church, goes out into the world, and runs with the children of the world...” (350).

- b. His suffering: ¹⁴ **And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.** ¹⁵ **So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs [which, to Jews, were unclean (Lev. 11:7)].** ¹⁶ **And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.** // Harold had an example of this in his Thursday class: You work at McDonalds; at the end of the day there is prepared food that is leftover *and you are hungry*, yet the boss says, “No, you cannot have it; it must be thrown away!” Dr. Kretzmann wrote: “The sinner must find out what misery and anguish he brings upon himself if he leaves the Lord, his God” (351). Some people who leave the Lord DO NOT lack for physical things, *but they DO lack peace of mind – due to no relationship with God.* As the younger son suffered, *he began to see the sad reality of his life!* So some suffering is for our good!
- c. His remorse: ¹⁷ **“But when he came to himself [to his senses], he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with**

hunger! ¹⁸ **I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”** // The younger son had hit rock bottom – *no money, no food, no friends, no family, no God!* In his heart he **was** sorry to His God and his father, **planned** to express that sorrow, and **was** hoping to be accepted as a hired servant. We have also sinned, so we deserve ☹*nothing good* and ☹*only punishment!*

- d. **His father’s underserved love:** ²⁰ **And he arose and came to his father** [*taking action to prove his repentance*]. **But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son** [*...not even finishing all he had planned to say!*].’ ²² **But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.** // The younger son had left **was** proud and disobedient, but returned **was** humble and sorry. He had hoped to become a servant – maybe like the tax collectors and sinners who were listening to Jesus, *but the father quickly restored him as his son* – robe, ring, shoes, and celebration! **Dr. Kretzmann** wrote: *“As the young man's repentance and confession were unrestricted, so the father's forgiveness was unconditional.... Thus the lost children of God that return to Him with penitent hearts are not admitted to heaven in such a way as barely to enter. No, the forgiveness of God is complete” (351-352).*

3. **The Obedient Older Son:** 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 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' // How will the older son react?

- a. His entitlement: ²⁸ **But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated [pleaded with] him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, '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 [in other words, I am entitled, I deserve such things]. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes [and who deserves nothing], you killed the fattened calf for him!' // Think ahead to judgment day... can you imagine people like the Pharisees and scribes – self-righteous people – telling Jesus they deserve heaven? Some THINK they do (Matt. 7:22-23), but NO ONE actually does!**
- b. His father's undeserved love: ³¹ **And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'** // Since God – *purely by His grace* – made us, *who were once dead in our sins*, alive in Christ, *let us also rejoice with all who are brought into God's kingdom!*

This Week's Challenge: No matter how bad or how good we are, *God loves us because of who He is and not because of how we act.* Identify someone who needs to hear of God's love; *then tell that person!*

Let Us Pray: Dear Father, since You love us and have saved us, let us be *in awe* and *full of gratitude!* In Jesus' name!

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