

The Lost Son and the Great Consolation this Story Gives

Luke 15:11-24

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, *'Father, give me my share of the estate.'* So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his field to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, *'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'* So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, *'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

But the father said to his servants, *'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'* So they began to celebrate.

Oh Lord God heavenly Father, we give thanks to you for your great mercy and love. We thank you Lord because you love us one and all with an unceasing love. You love even those who have gone astray and those who have left you. We thank you Lord God that you always are ready to receive and forgive a penitent sinner. You are waiting for these sinners to return to you that you might embrace them and give them a Fatherly kiss.

We ask you Lord - let this great mercy and great love move the hearts of each and every one of us. Let it move the hearts of those who have wandered away from you that they may (like the Prodigal Son) come to themselves and resolve to return to you. Bless this end the word which we will consider today, we ask it of you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen

***In Christ beloved hearers: Grace be unto you, and peace
from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen***

The portion of scripture which has just been read contains a great consolation for us all, especially for those who have left their heavenly Father's house and who have bid their God farewell. It pictures to us God's unceasing love towards us, the lost and condemned people of his creation. This scripture pictures to us our Father's love, a love so great that it is extended to those who have long since left and who have gone farthest astray. Nothing is more difficult for those who feel and admit that they have left their God than to believe God's undeserved grace will demand nothing whatsoever from them if they only return to him. And because it is so difficult to believe this grand, above all utterance consoling truth, God has caused this parable to be recorded in the Bible.

If we believe the Bible is the word of God, then we must also believe that God receives all repentant sinners and receives equally all

transgressors. Yes, even the most deplorable sinners without demanding anything whatsoever from them if they will only return to their Father's house.

God's grace is more than sufficient to cover all our sins. We learn this from Isaiah when he exclaims: **“Comfort, comfort my people, says your god. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.”** **Isaiah 40:1-2** When this passage says *“she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins”* - God wishes to indicate that his abundance of grace is sufficient for all, yes more than sufficient. We need not fill out any insufficiency by any of our own actions. Everything is prepared and all we have to do is to come home because our heavenly Father will receive us.

In the beginning of the chapter, from which our text is taken, we are told that Jesus talked to the tax collectors (Publicans) and sinners. He had conversations with those who felt that they had nothing in themselves of which they could be proud. It tells further how the tax collectors and Scribes, those who did depend on themselves and their own good deeds, reproached Jesus because of his loving conversations with these despised tax collectors and sinners. To defend his conduct and to give comfort to those who, like the tax collectors and sinners, feel that they have nothing to offer, but must receive salvation as a gift - Jesus made use of this parable.

The Lost Son and the great Consolation the Story Gives

The Holy Scripture is a fountain of living water, every portion of it proclaims: **“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.”** Isaiah 55:1-3 The message in these passages can be applied to our text. In these Bible passages, the living water flows so fresh and clear, so inviting that it should create a thirst and a longing for God in each and every one of us. I will point out to you the fountain of living water, I will proclaim: **“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”** I John 3:1

The Parable of the Lost Son

A wealthy nobleman had two sons. The younger asked and received his portion of the inheritance and went into a far country. There he wasted his money with riotous living. A famine was in the land and soon this young man was herding swine, an unclean animal in the eyes of the Jewish people.

We were born into this world beggarly poor in the sight of God but in baptism we are *“born again”* and made immensely rich in the sight of

God. St Paul says: **“... don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Romans 6:3-4** We are born again of water and of the spirit and are we were made to be members of the household of God, heirs of all the riches of Christ. Moreover at our confirmation we pledge ourselves to remain in the house of the Father forever.

But where are you today? Are you still in the Father’s house or have you followed the way of the lost son? There are some who from their infancy remain the children of God until the snow of age covers their head, but these are comparatively few. A great majority of people are allured by sin and carried away by the lust of the flesh and therefore wander away from their Father’s house. Many parents themselves lead their baptized children into the ways of the world. Other parents let their children’s spiritual life, which was planted in youth, to die of starvation by a lack of religious instruction. Even many of those who are carefully instructed in the respect of the Lord can fall away: some into shameful vice like this lost son; others are seduced by ambition and pride or love of wealth and the world. In one thing all of these lost children are alike - they want more room for their earthly mind than that rules of their Father’s house allows. Their sentiment is expressed in the second Psalm: **“Let us break their chains,” they say, “and throw off their fetters.” Psalm 2:3**

How is it with your soul? Have you been faithful to your God and kept the vow you made to him in your youth? Or have you, like the lost son, left God and the house of your Father? If you have imitated the lost son in this, then imitate him also in repentance and return.

At last the lost son *"came to himself"*. He had been beside himself, his mind had been blinded by sin and he did not see that the life he was leading would terminate in destruction. But at last he *"came to himself"*, at last he saw the gulf of destruction he was steering right against, at last he woke from his heavy sleep.

You that have left your God and your Father's house - have you *"come to yourself"*? Have your eyes been opened to the dangers of the life you are living? Do you see the abyss right before you? You most certainly will fall into the abyss if you do not (like the Lost Son) turn around and go back to the Father. Your eyes will be opened either here on earth, or if you wait too long, your eyes will be opened in Hell. What will it mean for you to wake from your heavy sleep first in hell and then lift your eyes while in torment? I say what mean that mean to you? It will mean that you will have to stay everlastingly in the place of torments. Forevermore you will be imprisoned in the place where: **"... their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."** Isaiah 66:24 Hell is the place where: **"... the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."** Matthew 8:12

But yet it is not too late: **“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as you did in the rebellion.” Hebrews 3:15**

Today, you must repent says the Lord. Do not leave repentance until tomorrow - for then it might be too late. God has promised pardon on our repentance, but he has not promised life until we repent.

Many a young person reasons like this: *“Yes, I will repent and return to my heavenly Father. I will return to my God but not yet, not while I am young for I want to enjoy life first. I will enjoy the pleasures this world has to offer. When I grow old then I will repent, then I will return to my God.”* Oh foolish reasoning, remember this great truth: while true repentance is never too late, yet late repentance is seldom true. Remember that even though you do live to a ripe old age, it then will be very difficult for you to repent. It will be difficult for you to worship the Lord when you have worshiped the Devil for such a long time.

Very few people truly repent late in life or on their deathbed. We can also infer this from the fact that the Bible tells of only one single instance, namely, the penitent malefactor on the cross. Therefore: **“Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” Hebrews 3:7** Take heed, awake: **“wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” Ephesians 5:14**

At last the lost son *“came to himself”*. He decided to return to his father and set about to carry out his resolution. He did not resolve to repent and postpone it and then never do it, neither was his chief

desire to better his own condition. He was a servant in consequence of his wickedness, and was willing to remain a servant also in the house of the father. His heart burned within him to confess his sin and to become reconciled with his father. He did not attempt to hide his shame from his father, but he acted upon the words of the poet: *“Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot”*. He did not first cast about to procure a decent dress in which to appear before the father, he was willing to let him see all his disgrace. **“He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.” Proverbs 28:13**

There are those who do not dare to return to God *“just as they are”*. They first wish to better themselves and to become more holy (or at least less defiled). In this way, they will never reach the Father’s house in order to possess eternal life. No, you must be like the lost son and go: *“Just as you are.”*

What may have been the thoughts of the penitent lost son when plodding the hot and dusty roads? Certainly he again and again asked himself: *“How will my father receive me? What will he say, what will he do? Will he scold angrily or even shut the doors against me?”* No doubt the tempter followed him up and whispered to him: *“You hope for forgiveness with your father, but just remember what you have done and what you now are. You have squandered your father’s earnings in a riotous living and you know your father is a pious man who hates sin. How can you expect him to forgive such an undutiful son? And even if your father would be willing to receive you, would not such a fellow as*

you disgrace the stately halls of his splendid mansions? Must he not be ashamed to own you as his son? Better abandon your foolish hopes and turn aside to hide your shame as a vagrant in a strange land.”

Doubtless such thoughts came to the mind of the prodigal and then a feeling of heaviness and despair would come over him, and his foot would move heavily as his steps become slow. Yet he did not despair; again the remembrance of his father’s kindness would come to his mind, and his foot would move quicker and his strides become longer.

When a lost sinner awakes to a sense of an evil course and decides to come back he or she will say: *“I will rise and will ask my father’s forgiveness for Christ’s sake.”* But then Satan will surely make a struggle for that soul. Satan will attempt to lead a penitent lost sinner to despair by hiding the mercy of God from him and holding up instead the greatness of sin in contrast to the holiness of God. He will therefore seek to smother the sparks of faith and hope which were kindled in the heart.

Have you sinned? Does your heart long to be reconciled to your Father in heaven? Then remember the grace and mercy given to you in Jesus Christ. Never let the Devil tempt you to despair. Never suffer your soul to lose sight of God’s mercy.

Does God receive penitent sinners?

In the veranda of a stately mansion an old man sat in a thoughtful mood, he had two sons. The older son was in the field at work and the younger had left home long ago. The father had argued with the younger son, but could not convince him to stay. Later, the report had come back that this son was living in sin and vice. The old man was thinking of this wayward son and his heart was sad. He said: *“He is lost, he is dead.”* Oh that his eyes would be opened to see the error of his ways and return. The old man glanced down the road and saw a figure in the distance leaning on a staff, ragged and weak. Is it not the same lost son? Surely it is. So the report was true. He had wasted his money and now a penniless beggar. What did the old man do when he saw his son returning in such a deplorable state? Did the veins swell on his forehead, and did he rise up in anger to say: *“This ungrateful fellow - this vagabond!”*? Did he call his servants and give orders that if a vagrant would dare approach the house that they should throw him out of the house? No. Take note if you who feel that you are a sinner and long for forgiveness. Note his response if you want to God, but dare not. Note what the father did for the returning lost son. Spying his son in the distance, the old man rose up quickly as though the elasticity of youth had returned, his face brightened, his eyes lit up with joy and he said: *“See! See! At last he is returning.”* He ran to the gate and down the street. He spread out his arms to embrace his son and kisses him. The young man shrinks from the embrace of his father and says: **“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am**

no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.” But the old man does not stop long to hear a confession. He knows the whole story and to him it is sufficient that his son has returned. He takes him by the arm and he brings him to the house. He exclaims: **“Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”** All of the servants are set in motion. One servant must bring a dress, another a ring, another brings a pair of shoes, and others must rush to the field to kill a fatted calf. The whole house is set in commotion and the old man thinks no apology is necessary. He says: **“Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”**

In such a manner, my dear friends, your God receives penitent sinners. **“... there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Luke 15:10** It is true what the Pharisees mockingly say in the beginning of the chapter: **“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Luke 15:2** They said it with scorn and contempt, but to us who know our sinfulness, it is a most precious truth.

This is what we have to do - we must cast ourselves on the mercy of God and trust in his mercy. **“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” Isaiah 1:18** Though our sins are red like

crimson and as numberless as the sand of the seashore, the mercy of God is still greater. **”But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, so that just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 5:20-21** There is no sin committed that is so great but that the grace of God is able to subdue it. The Bible gives many examples of God’s all sufficient love and acceptance.

“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.” Psalm 103:11-14

The mercy of God is not only sufficient to cover all of our sins, it is more than sufficient - or it is as *“high as the heavens are above the earth”*. Throw all of your sins on the mercy of God in Jesus Christ and they will be consumed like a snowflake in boiling water. Oh here is mercy, mercy enough to share with all penitent sinners.

A penitent soul should not think itself too unimportant that a great God will not take notice. It is true, we are a very speck in this great universe, but David says: **“... for he (God) knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.” Psalm 103:14** God does not overlook the dust, instead he remembers it. God’s honor will raise all humble sinners out of the dust and bring them eternal life. This is

beautifully pictured to us in the parable of the lost son. In his father's house this young nobleman was provided with everything that was needed: a robe, a ring and shoes - and yet he threw all of these things away. And yet when this son returned as a penitent vagrant - he is given all of these gifts once again. The same will be true for all of those who have left the Father's house. Whoever you are and wherever you may be - if you will only return. You will be provided with everything that you need. You will get a robe (so beautiful and shining) that was washed and made clean in the blood of Jesus. You will get a ring on your finger and God's pledge that he will not forsake you. You will be provided with shoes and the strength to walk in the way of the Lord. Note, all of these things God the Father will provide to you. Yes, he is anxious and waiting, he is spying after you, to see if you will not at last return. He wants to forgive you and again call you his child. He will make you an heir to eternal life in heaven. He has the robe, ring and shoes in readiness awaiting your return. Remember this: everything is in readiness and waiting for you who have left your Father's house. God is waiting for you whoever you are and no matter how far you away you have gone. It does not matter how bad a sinner you are, for God is waiting for you. Return then that your heavenly Father may give you everything that has been promised. Return and his face will be brightened with joy and his servants, the Holy Angels, will rejoice along with him.

***Come sinners, poor and wretched, weak and wounded, sick and sore!
Jesus ready stands to save you - full of pity, love and power.
He is able, he is willing - doubt no more!***

***Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be –
World without end. Amen***

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.” For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:9-14

Receive the apostolic benediction:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost be with you all. Amen