

Sermon for March 30, 2025– Lent 4

Luke 15:11-32 (EHV)

Theme: The Forgiving Father

- 1) He forgives the selfish
- 2) He forgives the self-righteous.

¹¹Jesus said, “A certain man had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. ¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all that he had and traveled to a distant country. There he wasted his wealth with reckless living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵He went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He would have liked to fill his stomach with the carob pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, and I am dying from hunger! ¹⁸I will get up, go to my father, and tell him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.”’ ²⁰“He got up and went to his father. While he was still far away, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, hugged his son, and kissed him. ²¹The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²²“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick, bring out the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let us eat and celebrate, ²⁴because this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.’ Then they began to celebrate. ²⁵“His older son was in the field. As he approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. ²⁷The servant told him, ‘Your brother is here! Your father killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸The older brother was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹“He answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I’ve been serving you, and I never disobeyed your command, but you never gave me even a young goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours arrived after wasting your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹“The father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³²But it was fitting to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.’ ”

Imagine a young man raised in a Christian household, perhaps even attending Christian schools, who becomes bitter against God. Instead of viewing the Christian faith as a loving relationship with his Saviour, he perceives it as a collection of arcane stories and rules hindering his desires. Driven by this resentment, he abandons his faith and embarks on a quest to find fulfillment and happiness in what the world offers.

But why did this happen? Couldn’t anything have been done to prevent it? What are the Lord’s feelings towards those who fall from faith? And what should our attitude be towards them?

Listen to Jesus answer these questions for us in a parable, under the theme: **Our Forgiving Father**.
1) He forgives the selfish. 2) He also forgives the self-righteous.

Part One: He forgives the selfish.

¹¹Jesus said, "A certain man had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

The younger son in this story embodies individuals who grow up in the Church, but instead of rejoicing in the loving relationship they share with God, they harbour resentment towards Him. Just as a teenager feels bitter about their parents for not allowing them to do whatever they want, such a Christian believes they should be able to do whatever they desire, but that God's "rules" are preventing them. They fail to recognize that God's commandments were given for our protection and well-being. Worse still, the rebellious Christian often makes false assumptions about God and His Word, preventing them from fully comprehending the depth of God the Father's love for them.

Consequently, like the younger son in the parable, such Christians demand their "share" of the estate: they demand to use all that they have and are to serve themselves and not the LORD.

The father succumbs to the younger son's demands. Why? Probably because if he had refused and forced the son to stay, the son would have resented him even more. Similarly, God understands that compelling Christians to remain in faith won't make them love Him. Therefore, with great sorrow, He often allows rebellious Christians to leave and live for themselves, hoping that someday they'll turn back to Him in faith before it's too late.

¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all that he had and traveled to a distant country. There he wasted his wealth with reckless living.

The "distant country" symbolizes a Christian's separation from God and His grace when he abandons his faith. Such a person lives recklessly, using their intellect, emotions, will, wealth, and every physical gift God has given them to serve themselves instead of the LORD. These fallen-away Christians may feel liberated for a time, enjoying whatever they want without worry. However, the harsh realities of life soon set in.

¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that country, and he began to be in need.

The famine represents the hardships that cause individuals to question their purpose in life. These hardships can take various forms, such as the death of a close family member, financial difficulties, calamities, political unrest, or mental illness. Regardless of the cause, these hardships leave former Christians yearning for something they lack: true peace, security, hope, and love.

¹⁵He went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He would have liked to fill his stomach with the carob pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

Instead of repenting, God's wayward children often look to the world for help, hoping that it will offer them the mercy, purpose, and hope for which they long. But the help the world offers is really no help at all! Instead, it exploits the spiritually vulnerable, selling them empty platitudes and promises that only leave them more spiritually hungry.

¹⁷"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, and I am dying from hunger!'"

Praise God that the son finally came to his senses! Experience had taught him that the world is deceitful, promising divine grace and love, but ultimately disappointing us. After reaching rock bottom and being tempted to despair, God graciously gave this lost son an epiphany: his father is so gracious that even his servants have more than enough food!

How merciful God is in helping those who hit rock bottom to remember His grace! For some, a song or a hymn hits them when they need it most, for other it might be a Christian encouragement or random thought that God uses to remind the fallen Christian about the truth of God's love: that He daily showers undeserved blessings upon all, even those who hate him. The LORD is merciful, kind, and full of compassion. With Him is the forgiveness, love, and hope for which we all desperately hunger.

Trusting in the father's mercy, the wayward son says to himself:

¹⁸I will get up, go to my father, and tell him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." ²⁰"He got up and went to his father."

How could this son imagine that his father would forgive him after all the pain he had caused? He didn't deserve forgiveness! Yet, the son trusted in his father's mercy because that's the kind of man his father was.

What was true for this lost son is true for all of us. Memories of God's mercy and trust in His promised grace are what bring us back to Him. Instead of making excuses or rationalizing our sins away, we repent: confessing our unworthiness to God and asking Him to forgive us for His mercy's sake.

While he was still far away, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, hugged his son, and kissed him.

God the Father loves His lost children so much that He sent Jesus to pay for the sins of every person on Earth, regardless of whether or not they repent. He loves His lost children so much that He actively seeks their return, working in all things to bring them back to faith. And when

they repentantly turn to Him for mercy? He runs to meet them on the way, embracing them with His love.

²¹The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick, bring out the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let us eat and celebrate, ²⁴because this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.' Then they began to celebrate.

The father's forgiveness is so great that He doesn't even let his son finish expressing his remorse before welcoming him back as his son. The same is true for God: He accepts our repentance even before we complete our words, forgiving us for Jesus' sake and immediately clothing us with a robe of Christ's righteousness. He doesn't merely welcome us back as His servants, but as His sons. He calls upon all of heaven to rejoice with Him because He is so delighted to have us back.ⁱ

Such is the forgiving love of God the Father for his selfish children who abandon Him to pursue the world. He patiently waits for them to realize their sin – lovingly guiding them through every experience to bring them back to Him. When they repent, He willingly forgives everything without question. Yes, the Father's forgiving love is so great that it extends not only to the selfish but also to the self-righteous.

Part Two: He forgives the self-righteous.

Not everyone was glad about the younger son's return. We read:

²⁵"His older son was in the field. As he approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. ²⁷The servant told him, 'Your brother is here! Your father killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸The older brother was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹"He answered his father, 'Look, these many years I've been serving you, and I never disobeyed your command, but you never gave me even a young goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours arrived after wasting your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

The older son represents self-righteous "Christians". They may be life-long, active members of a congregation, working hard to serve God, but herein lies the problem: they do not serve God out of love, but out of obligation. They come to church because they feel they have to come to church. They try their best to keep God's law because they feel they must. Secretly, however, they yearn to live for themselves, as the younger son did, but fear holds them back from leaving. Consequently, when they see a notorious sinner repent, they are jealous that God should forgive them without them having to do something to earn it.

How often aren't we like the older brother, secretly yearning for the sinful pleasures of the world and resenting those who God welcomed back into the Church after living recklessly? Yes, we often fail to comprehend how fortunate we truly are. The younger brother learned through

experience that a sinful life is no life worth living. Why? Because it's a life devoid of God's presence and love.

³¹ *"The father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours."*

The Lord is with His faithful followers, always graciously protecting and providing for every need. The Lord surrounds believers with His love, bestowing upon them every good and gracious gift to benefit their bodies and souls. He even commands His angels to watch over us! Everything that belongs to God, He graciously gives us—a truth that will become most evident on the Last Day when God ushers us into glory.

We Christians often fail to recognize how blessed we are by staying close to Jesus! Notice that the father lovingly calls the older son to consider how fortunate he is at his father's side. He does this because he recognizes the self-righteous son's potential for resentment, just like the younger son did earlier in life. That's why he lovingly urges him to repent—to realize that the life the younger son lived was truly no life at all. Therefore, the father calls on the older brother ³²... *"to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found."*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, each one of us knows someone who has fallen from faith and is embittered towards religion. What should our attitude be towards such a person? Don't envy or begrudge them. Instead, love them. Earnestly pray for them. Share the Gospel with them whenever you can – reminding them of the great blessings we have as children in God's house. God will use your witness to call them back home. Understand the forgiving love God has for both the selfish and the self-righteous. Rejoice in this love yourself and share it with all of God's lost children that you know. Amen.

¹ Cf. Luke 15:10