

THE PRODIGAL SON

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Lesson: Luke 15

On one occasion the Lord while He was on earth wanted to teach people that we should always welcome back anyone who has done something wrong and is genuinely sorry for it. He wanted to teach them that we should be glad when a sinner repents, that is, gives up doing bad things and starts doing good things. We should not go on treating the person as if he were still doing bad things.

So, as He often did, the Lord told the people a parable—an earthly story with a lesson in it, a lesson in this case about what *should* happen when a sinner decides to come back to doing what is good.

The story was about a man who had two grown-up sons. He planned that after he died, his farm and all that he owned would be divided between the two sons. But the younger one came to him and said, “Please give me my share *now*.” The father gave him the money and the younger son set out for a far country. There he just wasted his money by spending it entirely on pleasure. The only thing he thought about was enjoying himself. The idea of being useful to anyone simply did not come into his head. He spent his whole fortune and had nothing whatever to show for it.

At this time, just when he had spent his last penny, there was a great famine or shortage of food in that land, and he began to be hungry, because he could not afford to buy what little food there was. So he was forced to do some work to earn a living. He was given the job of feeding swine or pigs, and he was so hungry that he would willingly have eaten the coarse food that the pigs were eating.

And then he came to his senses. He began to realize how foolish he had been, and that it was all because of his own selfishness. He began to think of what life had been like before he had left home, and the thought came to him that even the servants in his father’s house were better off than he was. Here he was, the son of the owner of the property, and yet he was living a most miserable life.

So he decided to overcome his pride and return to his father, admit that he had done wrong, and ask to be forgiven. He was going to admit that he had sinned against the Lord, too, because the kind of life he had been living was not the kind of life that the Lord wants people to live. Whenever we do anything wrong against another person, we are also sinning against the Lord.

From this time on, everything changed for the better. As soon as the young man came within sight of his father's house, his father saw him, had compassion or pity for him, and ran to meet him. He gave him a great welcome, and the son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son." You can see from this, from the way the son was so humble and so deeply sorry, that he was really determined to live a better, more useful life. His father understood that, and he called everyone together to make a great feast, with the son who had returned as the honored guest. It was to be a great feast to celebrate his return. Now that the younger son had repented, that is, had changed for the better, he was no longer to be treated as a sinner but was to be welcomed back.

But the other son, the older one, did not understand this. He was very hurt and jealous that his younger brother, who had wasted all his share of his father's goods, should be given such a wonderful feast in his honor, when he, the elder son, had never been so treated. He failed to see that his younger brother had repented—he had changed his life for the better, and had learned his lesson. The father had to point out that it was right for them to celebrate the younger son's return, because he had been like a sheep that had been lost and then found.

The Lord told this story for us today, too. He told it to remind us that He treats all people the way that earthly father treated his repentant son in the parable. If anyone does anything wrong and then humbly admits that he is doing wrong and *stops doing it* and begins a new life, then the Lord always forgives him, rejoices with him in his new life and helps him keep on doing what is good.

Let us always remember that. If we stop doing the wrong thing, the evil thing, the Lord will always forgive us and help us make a new start. As He Himself taught us, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10).

Amen.