

ACCEPT ME!

By Terry Jones, August 24, 2008
Christ's Church at Tiffin, Ohio

Luke 15:11-32

CENTRAL SERMON THEME – God wants His church to join with Heaven in rejoicing over those come to Christ in repentance.

INTRO. - This parable is the most beloved of the stories Jesus told. Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "This is the greatest short story inside or outside the Bible." In this parable Jesus is teaching His listeners and readers God's forgiveness is available for everyone. The purpose of this story is more than emotional and literary enjoyment.

Luke chapter 15 begins with the account of Jesus teaching the sinners and the lowest class of sinners, tax collectors. These religious hypocrites grumbled against Jesus saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." Jesus acknowledges their criticism for He came to earth to receive sinners and eat with them.

To answer the accusation of being with sinners, Jesus tells three parables. The first parable is about a man who owned 100 sheep. One of the flock became lost. The owner searched until he found the lost sheep. He carried the lamb home on his shoulders. The happy owner celebrated with a party because he had found his lost sheep. Jesus added this footnote, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

In the second story a woman with ten coins loses one of her coins. She cleans her house thoroughly until she finds the lost coin. Upon finding the lost coin she calls her neighbors and friends together to celebrate. Jesus added, "I tell, you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinners who repents."

The third story has a young man leaving home but returning to the joy of his father but to the anger of his older brother. The story of the returning son teaches us how God wants us to respond to those who rebel and later turn to God. The power of this parable rests in our identification with the characters. Are we like the younger son, the older son, or the father? This parable presents four dramatic scenes that form one theme.

I. CONFESS OUR REBELLION, Vv. 11-19

- A. A wealthy farmer had two sons.
1. The younger son decided to claim his inheritance early before his father died, which allowed him one third of the family's wealth.
 2. The father divided up his wealth giving the younger son his share.
 3. This son traveled to a distant country.
- B. While in the distant country he wasted his estate with loose living.
1. Being immature he spent all his money on his pleasures.
 2. As soon as he spent all his money a severe famine dried up the opportunities for a good job.
 3. His only choice of a job was feeding pigs.
 - a. The job paid so little he even wanted to eat the pigs' food, pods from shelled beans.
 - b. He became so desperate he said, "I am dying here with hunger."
 - c. Feeding pigs for a Jewish boy was the depths of despair.
 4. Poem from Bill Steinmetz

T'was an evening in October
 And I was feeling far from sober
 Walking home alone, a man of pride
 But my feet began to stutter
 So I laid down in the gutter
 And a pig came up and laid down
 By my side
 Now, I can handle this fair weather
 When good fellows get together
 Until a lady passing was heard to say,
 "You can tell a man who boozes,
 By the company he chooses."
 And the pig got up and slowly walked away.
- C. While in these desperate conditions he comes to his senses.
1. He remembers his father back home - the hired servants lived better than he was living.
 2. He changed his mind about his life of pleasure in a distant country.
 3. He said to himself, "I will get up and go to my father and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, make me as one of your hired men."
 4. The younger son could not expect to be treated like a son because he had abused his rights as a son.

5. He will beg his father for a job as a hired man on the farm which was much better than feeding pigs.

D. Application

1. Illus. - Watchman Nee tells about a new convert who came in deep distress to see him. "No matter how much I pray, no matter how hard I try, I simply cannot seem to be faithful to my Lord. I think I'm losing my salvation." Nee said, "Do you see this dog here? He is my dog. He is house-trained; he never makes a mess; he is obedient; he is a pure delight to me. Out in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess, he throws his food around, he fouls his clothes, he is a total mess. But who is going to inherit my estate? Not my dog; my son is my heir. You are Jesus Christ's heir because it is for you that He died." *Unknown.*
2. Jesus died on the cross for people who have made a mess out of their lives.
3. Can you identify with this younger son? If so, confess your rebellion to God.

II. ADMIT OUR UNWORTHINESS, Vv. 20-24

A. The young man got up from the hog pen to head home.

1. He prepared a speech to give to his father when he gets within hearing distance.
2. Illus. - I imagine an older couple sitting on their front porch just before the sun had set. Dad turns to Mom, "Have we heard from him lately? Any phone calls or emails or text messages?" She answers, "No. I am so worried. We have not heard from him for weeks." A silence follows as they fear their son may be gone forever. Dad decides to check the gate to the house before they retire for the evening. About that time one of their dogs barks. He looks into the setting sun when he sees the silhouette of a man walking toward their house. He first thinks it could be a beggar looking for some food or a place to lodge. But something looks familiar about the walk. Could it be his son? As he gets closer he hears a voice, "Hey Dad, it's me." The father forgets all the trouble of the past and runs for his son. He grabs, hugs him, kisses him and holds him. His mother comes running who hugs and kisses him. Before long all the workers and servants come to see what the turmoil is. The son asks to speak, "Father, I have sinned

against God and you. I am not worthy to be called one of your sons. Make ..." The father interrupts him. He says to the house keeper, "Get the best robe for him. Get a ring for his hand. Put shoes on his feet." To the chief cook he says, "Prepare the fattened calf for a feast. My son has returned. He was dead but is alive. He was lost and is now found." I imagine this younger son said to all the people who attended the party, "I do not deserve this party."

B. God is the loving father.

1. The father already felt compassion for him before he made his confession but the humility was part of the father's restoration to being his son.
2. The robe, the ring, the shoes, and the celebration meant that the father restored him to be his son.
3. Illus. - This rebellious son came home confessing he had sinned against God and his father. He admitted he was no longer worthy to be his son and begged to become a hired employee on the farm. He was once demanding and full of pride but now he is humble. Since God already knows all about us, why not be open with God?
4. Admit your unworthiness for God's help.

III. ACCEPT THE FORGIVEN, Vv. 25-30

A. When the younger son returned, not everyone was happy.

1. Illus. - I imagine the older son drove the tractor into the shed so late he needed the lights after a long hard day in the fields. He shut the engine down as he slowly crawled out of the cab. The fatigue showed as he slowly walked away from the tractor to the house to get a late meal when suddenly he hears a loud noise. He hears music and people laughing as they dance together. His family was having a party but no one had informed him. How could they? He found a servant who could inform him. He heard these upsetting words, "Your father is celebrating because your brother has returned home safely." He became so indignant he decided to boycott the party. His father came out to plead with him to join the party. He lost it saying, "Look! I have worked hard for you all these years and you never gave me a baby goat to party with my friends, but as soon as this son of yours came who wasted your wealth with prostitutes you kill the fattened calf! It is not fair."

2. Jesus inserted this scene about the older brother to teach the Pharisees and scribes to accept those people God forgives.
3. Grace is not fair and challenges us to change.

B. Application

1. We can become like the older son and the Pharisees of old.
2. The Barna Group researched how outsiders view Christians. We need to awaken to the reality of what people who need Christ think of us and change this image.
 - a. Hypocritical - saying one thing and doing another. Christians think the church is only a place for virtuous and morally pure people. One of our values is authenticity, to be real.
 - b. Too focused on getting converts. They feel like targets rather than people. Our Vision is to be a Christ-sharing church who studies and applies the Bible, selflessly serve, and display a Godly love for family, friends, and community.
 - c. Antihomosexual. Outsiders say Christians are bigoted and show disdain for gays and lesbians. A value is unity expressed among Christians by acceptance and love of one another.
 - d. Sheltered. Christians are thought of as old-fashioned, boring, and out of touch with reality. We are not willing to deal with the grit and grime of people's lives.
 - e. Too political. We are overly motivated by a political agenda, that we promote and represent politically conservative interests and issues.
 - f. Judgmental. Outsiders think of Christians as quick to judge others. They doubt we really love people as we say we do.
3. Let us hold to the value of the Word of God and love others as Christ loved us.

IV. CELEBRATE NEW LIFE, Vv. 31, 32

- A. The last scene is the father explaining why he is celebrating.
 1. His brother had been dead and was now alive and was lost and is now found.
 2. Church is not for the church but for those who are outside the church.
 3. The celebration is to give the new person in Christ a good start.

4. Ex. - In front of a church sponsored school was this slogan for new students, "A good beginning never ends." Let's give new people a good beginning.
- B. Illus. - I will never forget a young man who stumbled into my office one day during our ministry in Eastern Kentucky. His eyes showed he was not totally alert. He asked if I could take some time to help him. I heard him confess to being on drugs, being on the verge of destroying himself, being so depressed, and guilty. We talked about him and God for over two hours. He returned the next day for another two hour session being much more alert. In a few weeks he told me he wanted to become a follower of Christ. We planned his confession and baptism the following Sunday morning. I was so excited for him and his family. After I baptized him, I brought him back to the auditorium for people to greet him. Not one church member spoke to him. When he walked toward them they turned away. He was heart broken. He never got his life right with God and his family. I was so disappointed in that church and I told them I was disappointed. When someone comes to Christ, celebrate with them! Welcome them! Do not be a Pharisee! Do not pretend to be so righteous you cannot welcome people who are rising up from the messes of their lives.

CONCLUSION - God did not announce the invention of radio because the angels sing and speak live throughout Heaven. No one in Heaven noticed when TV was invented for God has complete access to all the drama He desires. God never celebrated in Heaven with the invention of the computer and the Internet because God knows all, sees all, and hears all. Heaven never stopped to note the landing of man on the moon because God had already placed one moon around the earth, two moons around Mars, sixty moons around Saturn, and sixty three moons around Jupiter. However, God throws a party and celebrates when one person who is tired of the mess in life comes home to God! We too being God's people want to celebrate with Heaven.

Which one of these characters are you? The younger son? We fit his character if we have rebelled against God and are wasting our life with our own wants. The older son? We are like the older son if we feel secure in our own goodness while looking down on those not like us. The loving father? We resemble the loving father when we welcome those who come to Christ with love and acceptance.