

Acceptance

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[0:00] Some may accept poor treatment and avoid confrontation.! In the workplace, a person might laugh at jokes that they dislike just to fit in.

! In families, someone might hide their true self out of fear of rejection.! At school, students sometimes agree with things they don't believe or join in unkind behavior, desperate to belong. Others move far away from home and change how they talk or act so they don't stand out. These are ways people lose pieces of themselves, large or small, just for belonging.

With all these sacrifices for acceptance, we might wonder, will God accept us? Is he an accepting God? Well, we learn what God is like from what God does.

And Jesus illustrates with three parables. In the beginning of the chapter, the tax collectors and sinners draw near to Christ.

[1:02] The Pharisees complain about this, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. What is their complaint? That they believe that the holy should separate from the tainted.

Why would God's prophet eat with sinners? Jesus' counter? He gives the parables as a demonstration of why he can eat with sinners.

And he uses the examples given to urge his disciples to honor even the weak. He came from heaven to save all. Even the lost and broken.

Even the outsiders, which the Pharisees hate. We too should value others for Christ's sake. It makes no sense at all for us to look down on people whom the Son of God has held so high.

And even these weaker ones have flaws that might make them easy to scorn from the Pharisees' perspective. But our pride will not be forgiven on that account. We should value them not because of how worthy their virtues are, but for the sake of Christ.

[2:06] And he who will not follow Christ's example is proud. This is what the Pharisees are doing. We all need grace. Each of us is broken and called to holiness.

We need mercy and a call to follow God. We should rejoice when the lost return. Like someone rejoicing over finding something lost. Like a sheep or a coin. This is what the Pharisees ought to do. And that is the reason for Jesus' parables. And the first main point of these parables, or our first main point, is that God rejoices when he finds sinners.

Because it has changed from death to life. Jesus tells us that the point of the two earlier parables about the lost sheep and coin is to show that there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who do not need to repent.

So first we'll answer, why is there more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents? Both the perseverance of Christians in faith and the new conversion show God's glory and grace.

[3:15] But the difference could be that repentance, which turns someone from a completely broken life of suffering under sin, is hard. Those of you who already have faith must groan under the weaknesses of your flesh and labor to correct them.

But those who haven't yet been granted faith in Christ will have to reverse every weakness, every love, and every affection that is not touched by the grace of God. It's hard to completely reverse course.

Sometimes you'll hear people ask, if we're just meant to believe in God, if that's the point, why doesn't he make it easier? Or why doesn't he just show himself to us? Apart from the fact that seeing isn't believing, thinking about God being real is not a very good image of what conversion

and repentance really is.

We don't just see evidence to truly believe. To truly get it, you have to die. You have to be buried with Christ on the cross and be raised with him.

You have to be refined like gold in a furnace. You have to deny yourself. This is union with Christ. What happened to Jesus historically, in dying, being buried, and being raised again, becomes true of you spiritually the moment you believe.

[4:43] Your old sinful nature is not reformed. It's executed. Sins, legal power, and grit break because a dead person cannot be enslaved or condemned.

It's not easy. This is why there is rejoicing. In jumping ahead a bit, as we have read, the Father will say, For this son of mine was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. In the same way, God does not receive you on the basis of your reformed record or partial reformation. He accepts you fully and joyfully the moment you come home in faith and repentance.

Because in Christ, your old self has already died. And you now stand before him as a beloved son or daughter, clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Welcome to the table with celebration. The cross puts to death the old you, so that the Father can run to embrace you without hesitation or condition.

[5:48] So we see why God rejoices when he finds sinners. Because it's a change from death to life. We have then the parable of the prodigal son or the story.

It might be called the story of the wasteful son or the lost son. And it differs from the other two parables by having the older brother react to the finding. This parable confirms the demonstration of heaven's joy at the restoration of sinners.

In the first half, it reveals how readily God pardons. And in the second half, highlights the wickedness and stubbornness of those who grumble at his compassion. In other words, our second point is that you can find acceptance in God because he is unmeasurably quick to forgive those who have faith in him.

And our third point will be that you can find acceptance among God's people since we have been warned by God to be as compassionate as he is.

So the second point. Christ shows you that you can find acceptance in God because he is immeasurably quick to forgive those who have faith in him. How does Christ do this? In the person of a young reckless spender who, having been bought from the deepest poverty by luxury and wastefulness, returns as a beggar to his father, to whom he had been disobedient and rebellious.

[7:15] Christ describes all sinners who, exhausted by their foolishness, turn to the grace of God. He compares God to the kind father who not only pardons the crimes of his son, but on his own accord, meets him when returning.

God who is not satisfied with pardoning those who pray to him, but even comes forward to meet them with the compassion of a father. So verse 11.

Jesus continued. There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, Father, give me the share of my estate. So he divided his property between them.

Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country where he squandered his property in reckless living. The younger son here hopes to leave his father.

He hopes to live in a life of hedonism. He sets his sights far away from continuing to work for his father and goes to a place where he is not seen.

[8:18] He doesn't stay and spend the money there. He leaves. And what does he do with the cash from selling the inheritance which his father had given him? He squanders it.

He is reckless with everything that he has. After this, he deserves no forgiveness from his father. Verse 14. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in the 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 fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

He will realize that there is no safety apart from his father. Since he is reckless, the evil of the world brings him to starvation. Do we lack the judgment and wisdom to rule our own lives?

Do we have healthy fear or shame to hold us back from our base desires? Without God's grace, we head towards whatever our sinful desires would point us to.

[9:27] We rush headlong into spiritual poverty. Like the son being far away from his father, he is left to waste away in hunger. He has eaten up his own wealth in piggish gluttony and now becomes the friend of pigs.

The Pharisees, listening to this illustration, will understand it as a terrible image of their worst nightmare, the complete spiritual destitution of an Israelite who does not eat pork, let alone eat with food.

He finds no love or acceptance in the world either. He can transact with people and work for them, but he finds no charity. And he has given up the bread of his own house for the slop of reckless living.

Verse 17, when he came to his senses, he said, how many of my father's hired servants 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 servants. So he got up and went to his father. The practical and spiritual meaning of the parable begin to converge here because the son is repentant to his father and to heaven.

[10:45] And we see here how God calls people to repentance. If we were wise on our own and willingly submitted to him, he would draw us gently. But because we never bow in obedience until we've been humbled by hardship, he often has to discipline us.

For this young man who had grown wild and rebellious because of his wealth, hunger turned out to be the best teacher. From this example, we should learn not to think of God as being cruel when he sends us heavy troubles.

Those who are stubborn and drunk with pleasure are taught by him to become obedient. All miseries we go through are a useful call to repentance. Because we are slow to learn, we hardly ever come to our senses unless we are driven by extreme distress.

Until we are pressed on every side and feel utterly hopeless, our sinful nature keeps on enjoying itself or at least pulls back from change and repentance. From this, we can see that there is no reason to be surprised if the Lord often uses strong, even repeated blows to break our stubbornness, like leading a sharp axe to chop down a tough tree.

It's also worth noting that the hope of being better off if he returned to his father gave this young man courage to repent. No amount of punishment by itself will soften our hard hearts or make us truly sorry for the sins which we have committed until we see some hope of good coming from it.

[12:18] just as this young man moved by trust in his father's kindness sought reconciliation, so the beginning of our repentance must be a belief in God's mercy that stirs hopeful expectations in us.

The young son who has severely insulted his father repents and goes to him. In verse 20 again, 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. And this is the strongest illustration of the point. The point that you can find acceptance in God because he is immeasurably quick to forgive those who have faith in him.

If ordinary men who are by nature quick to wrath, quick to take revenge and very protective of their own rights, can still be moved by fatherly love to kindly forgive their children and gladly welcome them home when they have fallen into misery, then God, whose goodness far exceeds any parent's love, will certainly not treat us more harshly.

Just as this father does not wait for his son to beg and plead, but runs to meet him whilst he is still far off and embraces him before hearing a single word, dirty, ragged, and ugly as he is, so God does not wait for long prayers.

[13:43] As soon as a sinner truly intends in his heart to confess his faults, God freely and willingly meets him. Verse 21.

The son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Earlier, when the son had come to his own senses, he has realized who he

really was or who he could be again, a true son to his father.

And we see here another important part of true repentance, a deep conviction of sin that brings grief and shame. If a person is not truly sorry for what they have done and does not see their thing clearly before their eyes, they will try anything rather than return to the right path.

Displeasure with our sin must come before genuine repentance. Humility must accompany regret. The son is humble in that he doesn't even ask to be restored to the sonship he once knew, hoping only to petition his father to be one of his servants.

But the father interrupts the son, saying to his servants, Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Bring a ring and put it on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it.

[14:59] 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. The son has been chastised for being ungrateful by being allowed to lose everything which his father would give him.

And he felt ashamed at the reproach and disgrace for his physical and spiritual nakedness. The father not only pardons our sins in such a way that he buries the memory of them completely, but he also restores the gifts of which we have been deprived.

The son here has been restored to full sonship and embrace the father. But it is not the son's efforts that have restored him. The father's grace restores him. The joy of his son being alive leads him to identify with his son and bring him back into his family once more.

We who have faith enjoy the same restoration and reconciliation. In the parable the father states the reason for the joy. This child of mine was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. It's reminiscent of the death and life involved in conversion that we spoke about earlier. Remember that we are told that we are buried with Christ on the cross and resurrected with him.

[16:22] That's the summary of what God does which enables you and me to be forgiven by him. But what do we mean when we say the cross? We mean that Jesus having lived in perfect obedience to the father took on the punishment for our sin.

He took our guilt suffered and was killed for it and gave us his righteousness. Then he rises from the grave showing us his authority and victory over death. And that gift of life is then given to those who have faith and repentance.

Christ saves us from our own sin by suffering on the cross. It's a shameful death meant for criminals. It's God coming down from a throne to be mocked and shamed and killed.

And yet we're told in Hebrews that Jesus despised the shame. Jesus despised the shame of the cross because he regarded it with utter contempt and disregard. He treated the humiliation, the mockery, the nakedness, the criminal curse and the public disgrace as completely worthless and beneath his consideration when he weighed it against the joy that was set before him.

The joy of redeeming sinners and bringing many sons to glory, defeating death and sin and being exalted in glory at the right hand of the Father.

[17:43] He pressed on in full obedience to the Father for our salvation. In short, the eternal reward and glory far outweighed the temporary contempt.

Jesus despised the shame on the cross for the glory and joy in redeeming his people. The joy of redeeming you. God the Father sends God the Son to die and as such sustains a similar indignity. God takes the joy in saving and accepting his children. He takes joy, sorry. Similarly, in the parable, the Father is willing to commit the indignity of a man for his age and position to run.

The Father runs with joy for the redemption of his child. And the humiliation emphasizes our second main point, that you can find acceptance in God because he is immeasurably quick to forgive those who have faith in him.

We now come to the second part of the parable where we are shown the reaction to the restoration of the younger son. Remember, the Pharisees who are hearing this parable are represented by the older brother who want to shun those whom Jesus is willing to talk to and eat with, those who have been sinful.

[19:03] Jesus strongly rebukes those who would cruelly try to put limits on God's grace as if they were jealous of the salvation of wretched sinners. We know this is aimed directly at the Pharisees' pride.

They felt they were not getting the reward they deserved if Christ welcomed tax collectors and ordinary sinners into the hope of eternal life. So we come to our third main point, that you can find acceptance among God's people since God has warned us to be as compassionate as he is. So Jesus will show the Pharisees why they need to accept the redemption of those who are not yet found. He says in verse 25, Meanwhile, the older son was in the field.

When he came near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. Your brother has come, he replied, and your father has killed a fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. He has the same awareness of the danger to his younger brother as his father had. They would have maybe heard about the famine.

[20:18] He's just heard about his brother's practical resurrection. The father was joyful and yet he responds with pride and anger. Jesus compares the scribes to obedient children who, having patiently submitted to their father, father's authority their whole lives.

Even though they were completely unworthy of such praise, Christ spoke in accordance with what they believed about themselves to illustrate the point that even if Jesus was to accept their false claims that they have always been obedient children to God, they still have no right to reject their brothers so proudly and cruelly when they repent of their sinful lives.

The older son has also heard about the father's joy and is angry with him, rejecting him by refusing to share in the celebration. But how does the father respond to this rebellion?

Verse 28, So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, Look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

But when the son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him? The father is again gracious in approaching and reasoning with the older brother who is consumed with anger at his brother's past sins that he even refuses to call him brother.

[21:51] With these words, Jesus rebukes the hypocrites for their unbearable pride. Their pride is so great that the father has to plead with them not to be jealous of the mercy shown to their brothers.

God tells us through scripture and in this example that he strongly urges us to be patient with the faults of our brothers and sisters and to remove every excuse for harsh, unloving judgment.

Jesus does more than just let the hypocrite speak and he goes further and declares that even if someone had perfectly fulfilled every duty of godliness towards the father, he would still have no right to complain when his brother receives pardon.

We Christians hope to be free from this bitter, envious spirit to share in the joy of the father but Christ's purpose here is to show that it would be completely unjust for anyone to grumble or reject when his brother is welcomed back into life.

Even if that older brother were not one less bit holy than he could imagine, his pride is not in recognizing what the younger brother did was wrong but rather hating him for it.

[23:09] Even after their father had granted forgiveness, he hated the younger brother to the point of murderousness and practically wished him dead. verse 31, my son, the father said, you are always with me and everything I have is yours.

But we had to celebrate and be glad because your brother of yours, this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. Didn't the older brother get it?

He had been benefiting from his sonship all the time. He had not been left to starve or feed with pigs in order to taste bread. He has no reason to be angry when he sees his brother kindly welcomed home without losing anything himself.

All the time he has been working towards his own inheritance. Second, instead of caring about his brother's safety and restoration, he is simply upset because everyone else is rejoicing over his return.

On one hand, it is no loss to us if God graciously receives back into favor those who have been separated from him by their sins. On the other hand, it is wicked and harmless of heart not to rejoice when we see our brothers and sisters return from death to life.

[24:26] Jesus is still inviting the Pharisees to repent and accept the good news. The warning is, if they reject new members of God's people, they are essentially rejecting God himself.

Jesus warns us, we have to celebrate. you can find acceptance among God's people since we have been warned by God to be as compassionate as he is.

Let's finish by applying this to our own lives. Let us rejoice more and more for everyone who listens to Christ's words and his call to repentance and be even more grateful for how God continues to forgive our pride.

The outsiders are sons and daughters who can be brought back from the brink of death and death to life warrants celebration. After all, he came down from heaven to save not only the holy but those who are lost and dead in their sins.

Again, it makes no sense at all for us to look down on people whom the Son of God has held so high. And even if the weaker ones have flaws that might make them easy to scorn, our pride will not be forgiven on that account.

[25:40] We need to value them not because of how worthy they are but for the sake of Christ. Accept them by following Christ's example. And in humility, take joy and be glad that God runs to us restores us, celebrates and defends us, always calling us his children.

If you are here today but you do not yet believe, we hope to love you already and be a friend to you. And if you join us in faith, no pass will prevent you from being accepted.

If you have questions or want to talk more about faith, please come and speak with someone here. Come back and ask questions and take the next steps towards faith. you are warmly invited.

But recognize that if you do not yet have God, you are in a spiritual famine. What would the father of the parable say if his starving son could hear him from afar, if he could call him on the phone?

He would say, my child, come home. When will you realize the enormity of the recklessness and waste of all the good God has given you so far?

[26:55] God does not receive you because you've cleaned up your record. Rather, he offers to accept you fully and joyfully the moment you come home in repentance and faith.

In Christ, your old self has already died and now you stand before him as a beloved son and daughter, clothed in Christ's righteousness. Welcome to the table of celebration if you come to him in belief.

The cross puts to death the old you so that the father can run and embrace you and accept the new you with no hesitation. He seeks the coin.

He seeks the sheep. He seeks you. Child, come home. Let us pray.