

**Peace** be with you. We greet you in the name of God, the Lord of peace, who wants everyone to understand and submit to the way of righteousness that He has established, and have true peace with Him forever. We are happy to be able to return today to present your program *The Way of Righteousness*.

Throughout our studies in the Writings of the Prophets, we have seen that God is **holy and righteous** and that He cannot tolerate sin. Yet we have also seen that He is **merciful and compassionate**. That is wonderful news for us, because we desperately need His mercy, since we have all greatly offended God. Our trespasses and our sins are abhorrent to God, and they will condemn us forever unless He has mercy on us! Today we plan to read **two parables** which the Lord Jesus spoke to the crowds. Through these two interesting stories we will learn about **the great mercy that fills God's heart, and how sinners can receive that mercy**.

In **the first parable**, we will see **two men**: one who did not receive God's mercy and one who received it. One belonged to the sect of the Pharisees and was very zealous in prayer, in fasting, and in giving alms. He was exceedingly religious in the eyes of man. The other man was a tax collector, and thus a great sinner in the eyes of man, because most tax collectors were dishonest.

Listen to the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector. We are reading in the Gospel of Luke, chapter eighteen. The Scripture says:

*To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. **The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'** But **the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast***

*and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner!' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."*

What did Jesus want to teach through this short parable? In brief, Jesus taught that God shows mercy to those who **acknowledge** their unrighteousness before Him and that He condemns those who **imagine** themselves to be righteous before Him. That is what the Scripture declares when it says: *"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."* What man esteems, God despises. Can God accept those who praise themselves, thinking, "I am a righteous person! I say my prayers! I fast! I give alms! I go to the mosque! I go to church! I do this and that!"? Are all these "I"s pleasing to God? Not at all! The heart of God cannot be happy with works that originate from pride.

God hates the proud heart. Do you remember Cain, Adam's firstborn son, who tried to approach God by his own efforts? Did God accept his sacrifice? No, God did not accept it.

God has not changed. To this day, the heart of God cannot be happy with the **self-efforts of man**, because our efforts are not perfect before Him. What God wants is for us to **recognize our sinful condition**, like the tax collector who beat his breast saying, *"God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"* It is such a broken heart that causes God to rejoice. But He abhors those who compare themselves with their fellowman, like the Pharisee, who said to himself, *"God, I thank you that I am not like other men-robbers, evildoers, adulterers-or even like this tax collector."*

What the Pharisee failed to realize was that on the Day of Judgment, God will not compare us with our sinful fellowman. Instead, God will compare us with His own holy and perfect law which declares: *"Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just*

*one point is guilty of breaking all of it!"* The God who said, *"You shall not commit adultery"* also said, *"You shall not lie."* If you have not committed adultery, but you have told a lie, then you have broken God's law. You cannot enter Paradise, the presence of God, because the Scripture says: *"Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful."* That is why the children of Adam need **the mercy of God.**

Have you, like the tax collector in the parable, received **God's mercy**? Or are you, like the Pharisee, still trying to become righteous by **your own efforts**?

Now let us read **the second parable** which shows that the heart of God is full of love and mercy, like a father who loves his children. In the Gospel of Luke, chapter fifteen, we read:

*Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering round to hear [Jesus]. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable...*

*"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 fields 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.*

*Meanwhile, **the older son** was in the field. When he came near 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 the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' The older brother became angry and refused to go in. 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 this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' '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 this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"*

What does God want to teach us through this fascinating parable? In it, we saw three men: the father, the younger son and the older son.

**The father** in the story represents **God**.

**The younger son** illustrates **sinners who repent** of their sins and turn to God for mercy.

**The elder son** illustrates **religious people who deceive themselves** by thinking they are righteous before God.

First, let us think a little about **the younger son** who followed his sinful nature in wild living in a faraway land. What became of him? We saw how he eventually recognized that he had offended God and man. He was grieved because of his sins and repented, saying, *"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."* Thus, we saw how the younger son turned his back on the pig pen and headed for his father's house.

What about **the father**-what did he do? Was he angry with his son who had wasted his wealth? Did he merely take him back as a slave? No! Jesus said,

*"But while [the son] 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 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!'"*

What can we learn from this? We can learn that God is exactly like that father who was full of mercy! **God loves sinners**, and wants to show them mercy, **but He waits** for each sinner to repent of his sins and follow the way of righteousness that He has established.

Concerning **the elder son**, we saw an amazing thing. The elder son did not have the heart of compassion of his father. Instead, he became angry and refused to enter the house, saying to 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!"* Did you hear what the elder son said? He said, "Look! All these years I've been working for you, like a slave!" However, what the elder son did not understand was that the father did not want a son who worked for him like **a slave**. What he wanted was a son who would **love him from the heart** and take pleasure in doing his will.

To this day, many children of Adam are like that elder son. They consider themselves to be nothing more than "**slaves of God**." But God does not want us to be like **mere slaves**. He wants us to be like **sons and daughters** to Him. That is what the Holy Scripture declares concerning those who receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior, saying: "*For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a **slave** again to fear, but you received the Spirit of **sonship**. And by him we cry, 'Abba (Papa), Father!'" (Rom. 8:15)*

Do you view yourself as a **slave of God** or a **son of God**? How do you see yourself in the parable we just read? Are you like the younger son who recognized his sin and received his father's mercy? Or are you like the elder son who worked for his father like a slave? God doesn't want you to be like **a slave who fears his master**. What God wants is for you to be like **a son who loves his father**, happy to do his will. God loves you and longs to show you mercy, but He is waiting for you to repent and turn to Him.

That is what the prophet Isaiah wrote, saying: "*Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him!"*

**God, the Compassionate, the Merciful, waits for you to come to Him**, just as the father in the parable waited for his younger son to come back home. God wants you to repent with a broken and humble heart. If you come like this to God and seek Him with your whole heart, then you can be certain that you will meet the God who has a father's

heart, full of compassion and mercy. But the one who is proud and scorns God's great mercy can hope for nothing except God's judgment, which will be without mercy!

Thank you for listening. In our next program, God willing, we will continue in the Gospel to see how Jesus restored to life a dead man who had been in the tomb for four days!...

May God give you insight into what we have studied today. And remember:

*"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

If you would like more information about *The Way of Righteousness*, please visit the website: TWOR.com. That web site again is TWOR.com.