

March 31, 2019

Luke 15:1-2, 11-31

“Love For The Tempted”

“Lord, I’m Tempted” Series

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We’ve been talking in our sermons about the big, ugly topic of temptation. What a constant challenge, what a daily thorn in the side, is temptation! We’ve been exploring Bible passages and teachings, both fierce warnings and encouraging promises, regarding temptation.

We come today to this famous, familiar parable. Our Lord Jesus is speaking to us about temptation through this perfect little story. Many call this the “pearl of all Jesus’ parables,” and it’s easy to see why. I’ve read it many times, and I never fail to find some new insight or inspiration for my spiritual walk with the Lord. And that’s true today, too.

So what does this parable mean for us today? What does this story say to us about our temptations?

I want to challenge you to see two gigantically-important things in this story. First, see yourself. See yourself in the two lost sons and the temptations to which they succumbed. And, second, see the love of God. See the love God has for the tempted, including you.

Let’s talk first about the two lost sons. Immediately, we see the younger son tempted by greed. He wants to leave home and cut loose. But he needs cash. So what does he do? He gives in to his greed, and convinces his father to give him his inheritance in advance, a shocking, scandalous thing to do.

Next, he’s tempted by wild living. He heads off to the city, and lives it up. No restrictions! No guilt trips! No

accountability! Whatever he feels like doing, he does it. Some of us have faced those temptations, too.

But the worst temptation he faces is one we all deal with. The son casts his father out of his heart. He disregards his father, treats him rudely, shames him publically, and leaves him behind thoughtlessly.

And, if you understand the parable, don't we all do that, in different ways, to our heavenly Father? We say we appreciate and care for God; but so often we cast him out of our heart. We don't treasure him above all things, consistently. We don't honor God faithfully. We're quick to disregard him, and leave him behind, when we have something better, something more interesting or pleasing, to do.

See yourself in that younger son and his temptations. But in the older son, too. His temptation? Self-righteousness. When his brother comes back, he is furious with the welcome his prodigal sibling receives. "After all my years of faithful service here at home," he complains to his father, "You never showed me any love like that!" He's puffed with pride. He's holier-than-thou. He's giving in to self-righteousness.

And it's so easy for us to do. Good Christians like us, church-goers, are tempted all the time to look down on the many, many horrible sinners out there. We are so much better than the riff-raff of society, aren't we? Surely our God values our faithfulness, our goodness, our religiosity, much more than he values the wayward losers we see every day. Right?

Not according to the parable of Jesus. Not according to the words, and the actions of our Lord himself. Not according to the warm, welcoming, sincere love Jesus showed to sinners.

And that brings us to our second point in this parable. Make sure you see, also, the love God has for the tempted, including you.

Look, let's be honest. We all have a problem with temptation. We all succumb. We all give in, way too often, way too easily. What an incredible blessing it is to have a Father in heaven who loves us when we're tempted, who doesn't reject us when we fail, whose love for us can even help us through our temptations.

What can we learn about this loving Father from the Lord's parable? Well, first, notice how the father in the story allows his wayward son freedom. The father doesn't cut him off, when his boy gives in to greed, grabs his inheritance, and hits the road. The father is definitely hurt. He's crushed. But he gives his son free will.

As our God gives us freedom. God doesn't like seeing us give in to sinful temptations. But he doesn't force our obedience. Nor does he smash and destroy us when we fail. In his love, he gives us freedom.

Next, we see the father's love as he watches and waits for his son. When the boy repents of his wild living – when the kid finally figures out that he's messed up royally, that he needs to go home – the father sees him coming from a long way off. As if he's standing by the road, day after day, longing for his son to come home. He doesn't condone or overlook the sinful temptations his son's given in to. But he still loves the boy. His son may have cast him out of his heart, but the son has always been in the father's heart.

And we need to see today how our God has us always in his heart. God has a marvelous and mighty love for the tempted,

including us. Even when we're tempted and we succumb, our Lord doesn't stop loving us. He wants us to repent, and to come back to him. He longs for our return.

And even though this story doesn't state it specifically, Scripture over and over teaches us that our God is always at work helping us to repent, turning us around, facilitating our comeback. And, boy, do we need that help! Because we have the devil, and the world, and our own sinful human nature relentlessly tempting us, persistently nudging and prodding us toward trouble and away from God. But we have a loving God who is always helping us toward repentance.

True repentance always includes contrition, and always includes faith. And our loving God is always, through his Word, helping us to see our sin clearly, making us feel that guilt and contrition for our failings. But he is constantly, then, by his Spirit, connecting us to Christ, our Savior, helping us trust that Jesus died for our sins, sparking in us the faith to believe that the Lamb of God paid the price for all our offences, all your failed temptations, all our sins. And all this he does out of love for us, love for sinners, love for the tempted, love for you.

What a precious gift is this parable for each of us today, as we continue to wrestle with temptation in our lives! Take it home. Read it over and over this week. See yourself clearly in the two lost sons and their temptations. But see, also, the saving love God has for the tempted, including you. Amen.