

Sunday Sermon: March 31, 2019

Sermon Text: Luke 15: 1-3 & 15-32

Sermon Theme: Uncovering the Lies of the Devil: God Won't Forgive you for That

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup> “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. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> “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! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ <sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

<sup>22</sup> “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. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup> ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

<sup>28</sup> “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

<sup>31</sup> “ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> 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.’ ”

We all have that line that we don’t want people to cross. That line between what we think is acceptable and what is not. Sometimes it’s something someone says, other times it’s what they do that goes too far for us. When someone crosses our line and does something that we don’t like, we get angry with them and we certainly don’t want to be nice to them anymore.

Because we have this line in our life, the devil uses that same thought to bring to us another twisted truth, another fake news lie. Because we have that line, the devil tells us that God has a line too. When we sin, we have gone too far, we have crossed God’s line, and God will not forgive us for that.

A few weeks ago, we looked at the devil tempting Jesus in the desert. At the end of that text, we heard that the devil went away until another opportune time. While the Bible does not record for us another time when the devil came directly to Jesus to tempt him, we can be sure that the devil was there. The writer to the Hebrews says, “**Jesus was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin.**”

Even though we do not have another recorded battle between the devil and Jesus, we can see the devil was hard at work to try to destroy Jesus’ work. If he could not stop Jesus, he would work through others whose hearts were hard and who hated Jesus.

We see many people who became the devil’s tools in the Bible. In these New Testament lessons about Jesus, we see the devil working through many of the religious leaders of the Jews like the Pharisees, the chief

priests and the teachers of the law. They were not the devil's tools because they were any more evil than we are. They were not possessed or demons. They were ordinary men who fell into temptation and sin and did not repent of that sin. After they turned their backs on the truth of God's Word their hearts were hard and because of that, they became easy prey for the devil to work in and through.

On this day, the lie of the devil wasn't in a direct challenge to Jesus or in a test that they gave to him, it was in the attitudes of their hearts and the thoughts that they put into muttered words. **"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."**

The devil's lie, this twisted truth, is easy for us to see in the attitudes of those Jewish leaders. Their thoughts are clear. "These people have gone too far, they have sinned too much. How can this man who claims to be righteous eat with them. If he were truly God, he would never eat with them. They have done things that God won't forgive."

As with our other lies, the devil twists God's truth and distorts it into a lie. These people were experts in Old Testament history and the Law of God. There were many times in those lessons, where people rejected the love of God and his blessing and traded the true God for some pagan god and the sins of that pagan god. God's judgment was often seen on the unbelieving nations and even his own people who had hard hearts, who had rejected him.

The devil was there so that the Pharisees and the chief priests did not see God's judgment of the hard hearts and the rejection of his love and mercy, the devil was there to convince them that God was judging the symptoms of those hard hearts, the sins that now filled their lives. The devil was there to convince them that God would not forgive these sins because they were too terrible.

This was their attitude when they called people "sinners". They were proclaiming a judgment on those people and their sins. They were not worthy of God's forgiveness and his salvation because they had crossed the line and God would not forgive them. They were damned and were going straight to hell.

The devil is very good at his lies. He is very good at coming to us and making a sin look very good. He is good at convincing us that this sin will give us something that we don't have, it will make us happier, or fulfill us in some way. He helps us to rationalize why the sin might be bad for others, but why it is not so bad for us to do. He convinces us that God will overlook this sin because of who we are.

But what happens when we sin? The devil is right there to convict us of that sin. The one who leads us into the sin, is the one who is there after we sin telling us that we have crossed the line and are unforgivable.

The devil convicts us because he wants us to fall into doubt and despair. The devil only wants us to hear that God hates us and our sins, that God will punish us for those sins, and that the sins we have committed are too big, God won't forgive us for them. These are the lies that make us fear God and run from him.

Once again, we look to Jesus to see the truth that burns through the lie that we have done something so great that God will not forgive us.

Jesus tells a parable that includes almost all of the sins that the Pharisees and chief priests had in their list of damnable sins. There was the sin of pride, the young man demands his inheritance from his father. There are all of the sins that go along with a life of wild living like sexual sins, alcoholism & drug abuse.

Jesus also included another damnable thing in his parable. They would have seen the young man's job, his pig herding and even eating what those pigs ate, as reason to condemn him as unclean.

While the young man was sinning, he was not listening to the call of the Holy Spirit to turn from his sinful ways. He was not listening when the Holy Spirit was telling him that he was sinning. Yet, when he was in the fields with the pigs, his sin was made clear to him. We can almost hear the words of David from the Psalms in the young man's thoughts. **When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup>For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. <sup>5</sup>Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.**

What is our response when we find that we are making sinful choices in our life? When we find that drugs, alcohol, sex, lying, cheating, gambling, greed, selfishness or pride have begun to take over our thoughts and actions? Do we embrace those sins and make them part of our life? Do we rationalize or justify them as being OK? Are we happy that we aren't out there doing something worse? Do we cover up our sins with other sins so that we will not get caught? Do we need to hit rock bottom, like the young man in the story, before we ever think about the love of God? Do our sins sit heavy on us like the Psalmist says? Do we allow the devil to

make us believe that it will do no good to repent and ask God for help, because we have gone too far and God will not forgive us?

Jesus point in this parable is clear. Although this young man had ruined his life with sinful choices and actions, he still knew the love of his father. He still knew that he could back to his father and his father would take him back. And when he did, what happened? The love of the father for his son was even greater than the young man expected. The father didn't forgive partially, he forgave him totally. He did not withhold anything from him because of his sins, he gave him the best robe, the best ring, and a celebration.

The young man is us and the father is God our Father. We have sinned against God greatly. He has every reason to turn his back on us in the same way the father would have every reason to turn his back on his son who had run from him.

But, he doesn't. Like the father in the parable, God our Father loves us much than we deserve. He wants nothing more than for us to repent of our sins so that we will know his love shown through forgiveness.

God shows us his love by sending his Son to die on the cross to remove all of our sins by his suffering and death. He shows us his love by fully forgiving us. This forgiveness is not a forgiveness for some of our sins, a wait and see what happens forgiveness, or a forgiveness that expires with time. Like the father in the parable, our Father's forgiveness is complete for every one of our sins.

We cross the line when we sin against God. When we do, the devil convicts us and tries to lead us into the lie that God will not forgive us. Yet, our God is loving and forgiving. He offers free and full forgiveness for all sin to those who repent and believe in him.