

Our Christian Faith



Holy

Yahweh

Hell

Law

Preservation

REPENTANCE

At its simplest, the word repentance means to have a change of heart and mind with regards to sin in one's life, including turning away from that sin and clinging in faith to God's mercy, forgiveness, and love in Jesus Christ. In the gospel of Luke, Chapter 15, our Lord Jesus, once told a story to illustrate God's love for us lost sinners and how he rejoices every time even one sinner is brought to repentance. He told of a man who had two sons, and the younger son asked his father for his share of the inheritance. Incredibly the father not only endured that insult, but he also divided all his property in half and gave a share to each of his sons. Soon thereafter the younger son took all he had and traveled to a distant country far away from his father's eyes and there he wasted his father's money on wild, sinful living. But when his money was all spent, there was a severe famine in that whole land, and he found himself in desperate need with no resources of his own and nowhere to turn. In a last-ditch effort to survive, he entered the employ of a pig farmer.¹ He was so hungry that he longed to eat the pigs' food, but no one gave him anything.

There he sat—stinking, penniless, starving, and alone. No one had any reason to care about him, and he had no one to blame about what had happened except himself. But as those ego-crushing realities weighed down upon him, there was one thought that gave him the slightest hope: the memory of his father. The father he had insulted and ashamed had always been so good to him, so compassionate, so generous towards everyone he knew. So the son thought to himself, "My father's hired men always have plenty of food, and here I am starving to death. I'll go back to my father and tell him, 'I've sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men instead.'" Armed with that confession and grasping to that glimmer of hope, he returned home to his father.

But his father had been waiting and looking for his son to return, and when he saw him in the distance, he ran to him, wrapped his arms around him, and kissed him before his son even said a word—so overjoyed was he to have him back again. Thereafter, the son began his speech, but before he could make his final request to be made a servant in the household, his father cut him off and told his servants, "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."² The father wanted his son and everyone else to know that he still loved his son and had completely restored him to sonship. In the end his father didn't care about his own honor, didn't care about the money lost, didn't care about where his stinking son had been, he cared about his son. He was all that mattered.

There are so many lessons in this parable, but for our purposes today it is important to answer the question: what was it that turned the son around? It was two things: the realization that his own sinful choices had made a mess of his life and the remembrance of his father's love. Both of those elements combined to change his heart and bring him home again to live safely and securely in his father's love and joy.

¹ For lack of sweat glands pigs roll in mud to cool off, so they are naturally dirty animals, but they were also considered unclean under the Old Testament ceremonial laws.

² Luke 15:22-24.

You and I and every single human being need the same spiritual and moral reversal in our hearts and lives.³ We need repentance every day, because each day we wander from God. We choose to do things our way instead of his. We selfishly waste his blessings of body, mind, money, energy, and time on the empty pleasures of sin. We don't deserve to be sons and daughters of God. We need to be turned around again and again. Such is the way to life and salvation.

But repentance is not a process that we jump start in ourselves. Rather God brings us to repentance by his Spirit working on our consciences through his Word and Sacrament. With these he confronts us with the depths of our depravity and wraps us up in his all-embracing love and grace in Jesus Christ. Safe, secure, beloved, forgiven and fully restored in his arms, we have a whole new attitude towards sin: we prefer to stay near our Father and gladly serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness⁴ until he receives us into the eternal joys of heaven.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- 1.) Think of a time in your own life when you were in the pigsty of sin or despair. How did God's love and mercy lift you out of that hole and lead you back home again?
- 2.) Whom do you know that is being crushed by the weight of their sinful choices and convinced that no one could ever love and receive them back again? Point them to the cross of Jesus, where our Savior embraces each one of us with wide open arms and nail-scarred hands.



PRAYER:

Dear Father, for the evil I have thought in my heart, for the lies and filthy language that has come from my lips, for how my hands have hurt and the places my feet have gone, I never have been and am not now worthy to be called your child. Have mercy on me. Receive me and restore me as your own for the sake of your perfect Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

³ Mark 1:15; Acs 17:30.

⁴ Cf. Luther's explanation of the Second Article in the *Small Catechism*.