



WATCHING AND WAITING

Luke 15:11-32

TALES OF THE UNEXPECTED

You've all heard the theme music for Tales of the Unexpected. The TV play always had some sort of mysterious twist in it which hopefully the viewer wasn't expecting.

The parables of Jesus were to the people at the time often the Tales of the Unexpected as the characters within them sometimes break conventions and rules that would have been familiar to Jesus' listeners. Today we look at the Prodigal Son – TAKE 2. Last time we looked at the first part of the story from the younger son's perspective. Today we'll look at the whole thing from the father's perspective and as we do, this would have unfolded as a Tale of the Unexpected by Jesus' listeners. The father just doesn't act in the way that the Jewish listeners at the time would have expected.

We realise there first of all are two in fact two troublesome sons THE PRODIGAL SONS. One is the waster who leaves home and squanders his inheritance, and the other is the grumpy, envious one who resents his father's attitude towards him which he considered an insult as he witnessed a big celebration for the returning son. Either way, they are two selfish lads and the father has to deal with them both, and that can be summarised by the two words in our title this morning – Watching and Waiting.

I said earlier that this was a Tale of the Unexpected, so let's look at a few UNEXPECTED TWISTS in the story. In the first part, the twist is that the father welcomes his wayward son unconditionally. **SCRIPTURE**

"He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms around his son, and kissed him.

He was just so pleased to see him. By the convention of the time, the father should have washed his hands of his son. To ask for his inheritance in the way that he did was a travesty, an insult. But being a parent myself I can understand why the father was in effect looking out in the hope that his son would one day come home.

Did you ever run away from home when you were a child? If I took a survey I'd probably find that most of the people in this room ran away when they were children. **CARTOON** Of course, it wasn't serious running away – just going off in a strop. I remember doing it to my parents. Boy did I get into trouble – but I can remember my concerned parents walking the streets looking for me. Some children – particularly teenagers often go missing don't they – and they just disappear **BBC** and become subject of TV appeals and eventually end up as statistics – even murder statistics! **CLIP OF M5 MURDER**. For this real story, the parents told of their untold anguish on hearing the news that their lost daughter was found dead.

Our God is someone who has suffered loss as men and women walk away from him. Let's remember that. Day after day tens of thousands of people slip into eternity without God – because our whole race has run away from God. Never think that God doesn't understand the anguish of loss. He does. Each person that dies without Him is a tragedy - a loss.

THE FORGIVING FATHER

But why doesn't God do something about it? He has, He paid the ultimate price Himself to give people that opportunity of forgiveness and return – and that was the death of Jesus on the cross. Each person has the opportunity to return. But why doesn't he **MAKE** people trust Jesus? Because He made us masters of our own destiny. When children are young, you can get them to do almost anything you want and part of good parenting is giving our children the right values irrespective of how willing they are to learn them!

When our children become men and women, what power do we then have over them? They become masters of their destiny. How many times have you advised your adult children from the benefit of your experience only to see them ignore you and make a mess of things?

That's how God looks at the human race and He has to watch in sadness as people reject Him. Yet when they accept – He just jumps at them and welcomes them home. Do you have that eternal relationship with God. Has the Father welcomed you home? Have you trusted Jesus as Saviour and Lord. Challenge. Prayer

I said last week that many Christians walk away from their faith, or perhaps more precisely, often walk away from church. What is the Father's attitude to them. It's the same! God welcomes them home. He runs out to greet those returning to Him. Remember this when you speak to prodigals about their faith. Yes, they may have trusted Jesus in the past. They may feel a bit awkward that God will somehow have them back as a "fully fledged Christian" You'll remember that the prodigal was happy to come back as an inferior part of his father's household.

THE FORGIVING FATHER

- *longed for the son's return*
- *embraced his son enthusiastically*
- *celebrated*

The father did not even let him finish his speech – he gave him the robe of honour and the ring to show he was part of the family. Then they partied. That is the message God wants to give all returnees – forgiven with the Father is forgiven and the honour as a child of God is the same. Have you fallen away? Have you slipped up, backslidden – or whatever you like to call it. When you come back to the Father, seeking His forgiveness you'll find He rushes to meet you, in Christ your sin is dealt with, you are a child of God and He brings you back to the place He has made you in Christ! Don't hesitate, get right with Him today.

But finally on this section I'd like to underline the point. Because like stropky children, each of us run off from God from time to time. Something happens and we wander away from praying regularly, reading His word, meeting God's people. We may knowingly sin even though it displeases God. We let God down. Sometimes it can be a long time before we come before God asking for forgiveness and repenting. You know the consequences – things go wrong, we feel far from God; sometimes the consequences of our sin are obvious and embarrassing. Maybe that's you this morning.. We have a welcoming father who desires to embrace us, have us back – all we have to do is walk away from the pigsty and seek Jesus and we will find Him! Stop the rot, face up to your sin, find forgiveness and walk again with Him in repentance. Prayer

THE PATIENT FATHER

Before I finish this morning, I want to draw our attention to another unexpected twist. I find that the older son was almost as bad as the younger one. There wasn't much brotherly affection here. He finds out that the celebration is going on and he resents his brother for coming home and resents his father for making a fuss when he stayed at home had always been a compliant if not boring son.

SLIDE - *It's not fair. I'm treated like a slave whilst that layabout who's cleared off gets the fatted calf!*

You can see years of resentment flowing out of this guy. Why should his brother have any rights? Who's been the faithful brother – I have!

THE PATIENT FATHER

- *begged the son to share his celebration*
- *listened to his son*
- *put his perspective right*

Why do I give us all this. Because traditionally Christians have tended to let people slip away and been poor at welcoming them back. With backsliding Christians we can have the attitude "well, they know Christ so we don't need to worry about them". But we do. The parable of the Prodigal Son comes in a series of parables where we find a God who is actively involved in seeking and saving the lost. It's His business.

And what happens when they get back? Do we encourage them, or remind them of past weakness?

What does God do? Gives them that opportunity of restoration.

So where's our brotherly or sisterly love. We see someone who is ambivalent about their faith – maybe slipping away and what do we do? We let them slip away. And if they do return, how far does their welcome go. For the prodigal son, restoration was instantaneous and complete. That is God's desire for the prodigal.

And our patient Father is lovingly showing our weaknesses to us so that we will welcome them too. I believe this is our mission as a church as much as reaching the un-churched lost. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ – let's bring them back!

Let me finish with one last slide.

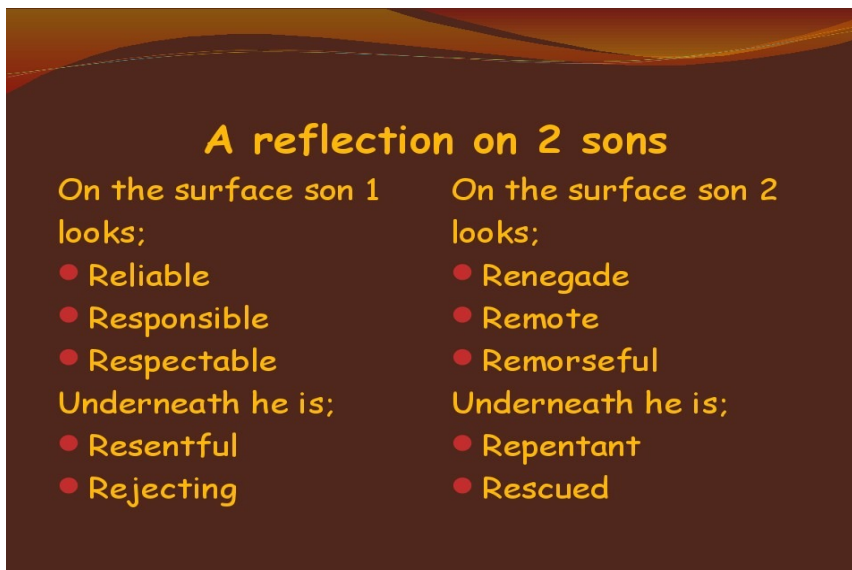
SLIDE *"My son, you are always here with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be happy, because your brother was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found."*

Do you know any prodigals? Pray for them, speak to them, witness to them – ask God to open a way into their lives – you may well be the “designated person for God to use to bring them to Christ. He is patient with us – wanting us to be that channel of return.

Are you going to answer that call?

Go to prayer slide.

*Preached by Mark Reid
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A reflection on 2 sons

On the surface son 1 looks;	On the surface son 2 looks;
● Reliable	● Renegade
● Responsible	● Remote
● Respectable	● Remorseful
Underneath he is;	Underneath he is;
● Resentful	● Repentant
● Rejecting	● Rescued