

When He Was a Great Way Off

by Roy Hession

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking peace with God before it's too late, and highlights the generous conditions of peace that God offers.

Duration: 44:43

Scripture: Luke 15:17

Topics: "Christian Life", "Reconciliation with God", "The Prodigal Son"

Description

Roy Hession emphasizes the urgency of reconciling with God, using the parables of the king preparing for war and the prodigal son to illustrate the importance of recognizing our lost state and the need for peace with God. He highlights that while we may feel far from God, He is always ready to meet us with compassion and forgiveness, urging us to take the opportunity to seek Him before it's too late. Hession reassures that no matter how far we have strayed, the path back to God is quick and accessible through repentance and faith in Jesus. The sermon calls for self-reflection on our spiritual state and encourages both the lost and the wayward to return to the Father, who is waiting with open arms.

Transcript

I welcome you this morning to Luke's Gospel, chapter 14. We were in Luke's Gospel, chapter 14, yesterday at one time. And I called chapters 14 and 15 the parable alley of the gospel.

Because there are no less than six parables there. I want to read you just one little one. Verse thirty-two, no, verse thirty-one.

We're breaking into the Lord's argument. And He introduces at this point, off the cuff, what you may call a parable. Or, He says, what man going to make war against another king, what king going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand.

Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth a delegation and desireth conditions of peace. And I want to link with that little parable a few verses from the next one, which of course is the third one on, the parable of the prodigal son. And I want to just read verses seventeen and so on.

And when he, that wayward son, came to himself, he said, How many hard servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto

him, Father, I've sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. There are not many sons, who've had to apologize to dad, who've gone as far as saying this, I am not worthy to be called thy son.

I haven't heard anybody getting as deep as that, in a domestic situation, but happy the people who do. And he goes on to say, and this is composed the prayer, he's going to say, And I'm no more worthy to be called thy son, make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose and came to his father, and when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

And I take those two excerpts from those two parables, and I put them together. There's a phrase from the first excerpt, which I want to highlight for you. And compare that with another phrase in the second excerpt.

In 1432, we have the phrase, while the other is a great way off, do something. Send a delegation, ask for conditions of peace. While the other is a great way off.

And then in the second excerpt, but in a different context, we have the same phrase. That when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and ran, and had compassion. Two places, where this little phrase occurs, while he was yet a great way off.

And I want to put them together, and what I think we shall see of lessons to be learned, will apply to those of us who are still lost. The Bible never talks about people being unconverted. It doesn't talk about people being unsaved.

It talks about them as being lost. And when I've been down south, I find the terminology just differs a little bit from up here. I've never heard them talk about the unsaved.

I've never heard them talk about the unconverted. But only about the lost. My daughter is lost.

My dad is lost. A minister says, the many members of my church were lost. Even some of the bold were lost.

And I've sometimes heard some of the church, some of the Christians say, our minister is lost. I like it, it's a beautiful word, lost. Because if you're lost, then there's someone looking for you.

Amen, that's what he came for. To seek and to save indeed from God's aspect. There are only two classes of persons in the world.

The lost and the found. We call them the saved, and the Bible does. But it really means simply lost.

I once was lost, but now I'm found. Was blind, but now I see. That much of what I shall say shall also apply to those who once were lost and have been found.

That things haven't been going on very well with them since they've been found. And whereas they haven't lost, maybe their salvation, and they've done with that original far country, they've got it back into some minor ones. And what God has to say will apply as much to them.

As for those who've never been anything but lost, and there may be of course, certainly are, those two classes in our congregation this morning. I want to think first of all about that first parable. The context is

Jesus telling the people to sit down and count the cost.

Before they act. The first illustration he gives is of a man who is building a building. He better sit down and count the cost, whether having begun, he's able to finish.

And then here's his second one. This little parable of a warfare. Of one king against another king.

And there's likely to be a great confrontation. This king is going to take action against this other king. Or the other king is going to take action against him and he's going to resist.

And before they have any such confrontation, the king they're thinking of sits down. And he counts the cost. Whether with 10,000 he's able to go against him that comes against him with 20,000.

The argument is that he wouldn't surely start operations without sitting down and making that calculation. And having done so, and having realized, he's hopelessly outnumbered, quite obviously he would do something about it. He would send a delegation.

Calling off the conflict and asking for conditions of peace. And he would do that while the other is still a great way off. The fact that the opposing army and the opposing king is still a great way off would not be taken as an excuse for doing nothing.

Or proceeding with his plans, he would rather see it as an opportunity to send that delegation and humbly ask for conditions of peace. The man has chosen to live his life independent of God. And his whole social life is built upon the assumption that God must be out.

He must run his own life and go his own way. It is really, the basic sin of man is really the sin of rebellion against the authority of God. I don't want to go my own way, I want to run my own life.

And that still may be the basic attitude of some of us here this morning. Now although God is merciful and gracious and long-suffering with men, he must ultimately take action against those in rebellion against himself. He cannot allow that man to go on and on with the wrath on his side.

And so this mighty king begins to take action against some of his rebellious subjects. And he takes that action very often in this life. He has to chasten that man.

Things perhaps go wrong. We say, isn't it strange how the wicked seem to prosper, do they? They have their fair share of problems, indeed they have a whole range of problems that only come to them because their behaviour has caused it. And God doesn't interfere with that process, he lets it go on.

He's got to take action against such. Many are the sorrows of the wicked. And even if it doesn't seem to work out like that, it's going to work out in death.

Jeremiah says, if you have run with footmen and they have wearied thee, how shalt thou do in the swelling of Jordan? And there's going to be that confrontation when your last moment's coming. When you gasp for breath. When you know you're passing from time into eternity.

And how will thou do when after death, as the scriptures say, there's the judgment seat. When the small and great are going to stand before God. When the books are going to be opened.

And when every man's going to be judged according to those things written in the book. Unless, of course, a man's name is written in that other book. The Lamb's book of life.

Then how's it going to do, how's it going to be with you? Don't you think you ever sit down, friend, and count the cost of continuing to go on lost? There are people here this morning, you've come with your wife, she's a lovely Christian, you are on the edge. She specially asked you, friend, have you counted the cost of going on like that? Are you, with your puny resources, going to be able to go against God with his infinite ones? Are you going to win? Are you going to get away with it? Make a calculation. Young person, mum and dad love the Lord and you dutifully come on Sundays.

But the truth is you're still lost. You've not yet been found. You've made no indication that you are lost.

There's never been the cry, really and truly, for Jesus to find you. You intend to go on like that. Following the world's way.

The way that everybody else at school or college goes. You'd better count the cost. When are you going to get away with it? Is it likely? Are you going to live in defiance of God and of his Son and win? Count the cost.

How will it be with thee? When the dead stand before God and the books are opened. One of the Psalms said, If thou, Lord, should mark iniquities, who shall stand? I want to tell you, you're not going to stand. You haven't a hope at that stage.

But you've got a hope now. Thank God. Plenty.

Wonderful opportunities we shall see. Now in view of the fact that you're not going to get away with it. That you and your resources cannot go against God with his infinite power.

Ought you not now to do something about it? Ought you not now, so to speak, to send a delegation to that mighty one and ask him for conditions of peace? Ought you not now to get right with God? Now in answer I'm going to suggest, you may be saying, it's certainly said by many, Ah, that any real confrontation with God is yet a great way off. Young people certainly argue that way. I'm young.

Plenty of time to think about that. Such crashing, awesome confrontations with God, either in this life and earth's calamities and sufferings or beyond. That's all a great way off.

I'm not going to run out of life for a long time yet. I could defer anything I do in this matter till later. And it isn't only young people who are inclined to think that any real confrontation with God is a great way off, but older people too.

Somehow the older don't seem to change their attitude. Any crisis is for you in your thinking still a great way off. And even Christians who know there are things to be gotten right with God, and things aren't right in their lives, and they're not really happy, they're not really in fellowship with God, they too think the need to get all that put right is still a great way off.

It is in our thinking always a great way off. Some time ago I was in a bookstore and I saw they'd got out a cheap edition of some of the great English classics. Paperback.

And there were some novels by the famous English novelist George Eliot, who lived, I imagine, in the Victorian era. Actually, she wasn't a man, she was a woman. It wasn't proper in those days for women to

be authors.

And so they assumed male names. But George Eliot is one of the most famous and beautiful of English novelists of that period. And I saw there the title of one of her books, Silas Marner.

And I knew a little bit of the story. I said, I'd like to read that. I like something a bit light when I'm just tired at the end of the day and I want to be rocked off to sleep.

And I thought that Silas Marner by George Eliot would be helpful to that end. And I found it a fascinating story, written of course in rather cumbersome Victorian language, but nonetheless very good. And then I noticed that the novelist, the author, did something that no author today would be permitted to do.

She broke off in the story to do a little bit of moralising. And what she said was most illuminating. I didn't tell her the story except to say Silas Marner was a mouser.

And he lived alone in the country. And he had gold. And he had it hidden away in a hole somewhere in his cottage, carefully covered over.

And every day he'd count his money and put it securely away. On one occasion there was some special thing, and he had to leave his house to go and do something. It was night time.

And he left. And he didn't lock his house. He'd never really locked his house before.

He wasn't welcome away. And he didn't on this occasion. And then another character in the story was passing just at that moment, went in, found the treasure spot and stole the gold.

And when Silas Marner came back to discover his precious gold was gone, he was heartbroken, shattered. And then there came this little bit of moralising by George Eliot. You see, he never expected it to happen.

He'd often left it there. He even left the house unattended. It had never happened before, and so he thought it never would happen again ever to him.

And now it has. And she says the sense of security that we have more frequently springs from habit than from conviction. The lapse of time during which a given event has not happened is according to this logic of habit constantly alleged as a reason why the event should never happen.

Never happened before? And you'll see it never will happen in the future. Even when the lapse of time is precisely the added condition which makes the event imminent. Statistic wise, if you've never had an accident in a car, it makes the likelihood of an accident more likely, more imminent, according to statistics.

We may never see it that way. For instance, she says, a man will tell you that he has worked in a mine unhurt by an accident as a reason why he should apprehend no danger, even though the roof is beginning to sink. And it is often observable that the older a man gets, the more difficult it is for him to retain a believing conception of his own death.

It's always a great way off. How come that you feel so secure? Well, nothing's ever happened much before. There's been no great confrontation with God and therefore you'll think it's not likely to be one at all imminent.

But the fact that there hasn't been, according to statistics, actually brings that confrontation nearer. But, all right, let's have it for a moment your way. That confrontation with God and trouble, even death and judgment, we undertake it for your sake, it's a great way off.

But what I want to say is this. That fact is not to be taken as an argument for you to do nothing, but rather as an opportunity for you to do the one thing that you can do. Thank God it is a great way off, because it gives you a chance to do something that could put everything right.

And what is the something? That you send to God a delegation. Rather come yourself and ask right now. That is still a great way off for conditions of peace.

And I want to tell you, if you were only too willing to do that, young person, or husband, or wife, if you were only willing, now that nothing much has happened, you're going to take the chance to go to God and say, please, I've been running my own life, going my own way, I've been in rebellion, please, conditions of peace, are there such? And you would find his conditions of peace unbelievably generous. Generous beyond imagining. You don't have to plead with him for the forgiveness of sins.

He's thought it up himself. He says, come now and reason together, that your sins shall be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow, that they be red like crimson, they'll be like wool. It was his idea, not yours.

You wouldn't have dreamt of it. You don't forgive other people easily, surely God doesn't. But he's got the idea, he's making a proposition to you.

And I want to tell you, you're going to receive unbelievably generous conditions. It'll be the greatest day of your life when you are prepared to ask for conditions of peace. Jesus has paid it all.

All to him you owe. Sin has left a crimson stain. You can be made man as white as snow.

And he can make over the mess. Something beautiful, something good. All my confusion he understood.

All I had to offer him was emptiness and strife that he made. Something beautiful of my life from the day. You ask for conditions of peace.

So my friend, don't let the fact that you think that serious confrontation with God is a great way off to let you imagine you needn't do anything. It's your opportunity. And it may not be, who knows? Such a long way off and how glad you'll be that when you had the opportunity you sent and asked for conditions of peace.

Now you get this same little phrase, a great way off, in this other story, the story of the prodigal son. We know it so well, we don't need to repeat it too much. That boy who went off on his own.

Now this isn't meant to picture sons that leave home and do the wrong thing in an ordinary sense. This is the history of man. All men are prodigal sons.

In their father Adam they took up what God gave them and have taken their journey into a far country. And we've been a lot of copycats. We've simply done what our father did.

But God knows how to make that far country an unpleasant place, an unhappy place. And you come to your own resources running your own way as this boy did. And the time comes when you say, how foolish of me.

The merest Christian is happy in a way I'm not. The servants in my father's house have bread enough and to spare and I, I'm so miserable. I'm so unhappy.

Things aren't working out. I will arise and go to my father and say to him, father I've sinned. I'm no more worthy to be called thy son.

I tell you, he's really got a... That's repenting in style. Oh dear friend, if you repent, be sure you repent in style. All of it can be very grudging repentances.

Partial repentances. Where you say, oh yes, I've been very wrong, but my life, the circumstances have been wrong. And my wife, I married the wrong girl, she's to blame.

No, no. That's not repenting in style when you're the only sinner in the situation. And so he began his way back.

And that old dad had been on the top of that flat-roofed house every day watching for his return. He was expecting him. Because he knew what conditions were like in that particular country.

He knew there was an uncertain rainfall. He knew there'd be famine. He knew that boy would suffer.

He knew he'd squander his money. There was one day I imagine, when he went into the kitchen, that there was mum providing a food parcel to send to him in the far country. And I think that dad said, Mum, you do up that parcel and put it away.

The sooner that boy feels the pinch of famine, the sooner he'd be back. And there he was looking. And one wonderful day, he saw the silhouette of a ragged person on the horizon.

It was the sun! And that old man in advancing years, clad in his flowing eastern robes, picked them up. And as hard as he can, he ran, he ran, he ran. And way up there, he found him.

And had compassion on him. And put his arms round him. And kissed him.

He could hardly get out his prayer of repentance. He was so smothered with kisses. And that boy was utterly reconciled and restored to his father even while he was a great way off.

He was all dirty. He smelt of the, we call it the pig sty, you call it the pig pen, is it? Or the hog pen? He smelt of it! He was in no fit state for ordinary company. That didn't matter.

He was still a long way off. But because the father took the initiative and ran to meet him, he was utterly restored to the favour of his father. And so it is with us.

You've only got to begin to breathe a prayer of repentance. Say, Oh God, I'm all wrong. Oh God, I must have taken the wrong step.

Oh God, there must be something better. That's not much of a prayer. But I want to tell you that's enough.

And this great God of ours runs to meet you. You can hardly complete your neatly composed prayer of confession before he's got his arms around you. You find yourself smothered with kisses.

And there were those crosses at the bottom of the letter. Kisses. Oh no, she said there, it's the cross.

And the cross of Jesus is God's kiss for sinners like us. You're ransomed. You're healed.

You're restored. You're forgiven. And all that while you are still a long way off.

You don't know your Bible much. You hardly know how to pray. You're certainly not improved.

You've not had any time to test yourself out as to whether you're going to go on with your bad habits or not. You don't know. Jesus says, I've come in answer to your prayer.

I'll answer to my prayer, Lord. I've been too weak to pray. But you sighed.

Oh yes, I sighed. That's it. That's all I wanted.

And my friend, I'm amazed at the grace of God that leads this great God of ours to run toward us. To heal us, restore us while we are still a great way off. You haven't learnt how Christians live.

You haven't had time to yet to put everything right. But the basic attitude has been there. Oh God, I'm wrong.

You're right. I'm wrong. And yet you hardly know how to express it while you're a great way off.

Still all mixed up. You don't know the doctrines. And it's the same with the believer who's gotten away.

He's gotten away from God because he's gone wrong perhaps in his relationship with other people. And you can't imagine you're right with God when you're resentful of another person. You've gotten away.

How in the world do I get back? I've done so many wrong things. I've made so many wrong enemies. Enemies.

But my dear friend, did I hear a sigh? Did I get away, says God? Is there someone beginning to feel, oh, it's me, Lord. I tell you, He doesn't wait till you've got everything, all your doctrines straight and your prayer neat and tidy. While you are a great way off, He runs to meet you.

And you finish your prayer in His arms. This is grace. Of course, there was some distance to travel back to the banqueting house.

But He travelled that distance with His Father. With His Father's arm around Him, helping Him over. And maybe, while you're still a great way off, you can be assured you've been received and forgiven.

Or maybe there are some things in distance to carry, but you're going to do those things as one who's already been forgiven and restored. And if there are apologies to make, it'll be almost more of a testimony of what grace has done, than a mere naked apology. Oh, the apology's there, but it's suffused by the joy that while you were a great way off, I cannot tell you of the mighty power of the blood of Jesus.

It's by that power you're restored to God. That blood that He shed at Calvary was enough for God. It was enough for all the sins that Jesus took responsibility.

God the Just is satisfied to look on Him and pardon me. Sometimes when you see that, an invitation isn't always all that necessary. The man threw in the seat.

In the old time days of Whitefield and Wesley, they preached until they knew that people were gravely affected. Some were weeping in their seats. Some were rejoicing.

Because grace was going after them. While they were yet a great way off. Oh, there was that response, but it was pretty poor.

I was talking to a girl who was a real neurotic of the most hopeless sort it seems. She'd been from counsellor to counsellor, even professional counsellor, and she was real confused and she thought, in coming to our conference, she was a bit scared, I'd have to do a terrific repent. One counsellor had already told her to make a list of her sins on sheets of paper.

But that seemed to do it. She said, well, that's going to be some terrific thing. And I told her about this grace of God.

This blood of Jesus. And though she was still in a mess and a muddle, she came and she prayed. She said, you know, afterwards, she said, you know, it wasn't a very good prayer of mine, was it? I'm not quite sure, but it was real.

But she said, I see now, it doesn't matter. If the blood of Christ is sufficient for God, it's sufficient for me. I said, sister, you've got it.

And she had. That's a beautiful letter from that girl. An intransient case of a neurosis.

If I'd listened to people's report on her, I would have given up hope. But you know, all that she needed was that grand old gospel which saint and sinner still need. And so we see these two parables.

The first would tell us, prepare to meet thy God. The second would tell us, God is prepared to meet thee. Amen.

He's prepared to meet thee. He's running to meet you. Someone has said, that picture of that man running is a picture of God in a hurry.

The God who's got all eternity in which to work out his purposes is seen to be in a hurry. When a man begins to take the penitent place. I've not got quite finished and these last words I think are quite the most important thing I want to say.

First I want to answer a question that you may have in your mind. Perhaps you've often had it when you've heard about this age old lovely parable of the father receiving that son. You say, in that parable where is Jesus? Where is Jesus in that parable? It's the father and the son.

Shall I tell you where Jesus is in that parable? He's in that father picking up his robes and running, running, running to meet that son. That is Jesus. There's a definition.

Who is Jesus? I'll tell you who he is. He is God run to meet us. In him God's already run.

The distance has already been breached. The work's already been finished. That's the name they gave him and the first Christmas his name shall be called Emmanuel.

Which is God with us. Which is God run to meet us. Which is God available to you.

In Jesus you have God available to you on street level. Already his name is called Emmanuel. God with us.

Brought down to us his name is called Emmanuel. And all the love and riches that God has got for failing saints and lost sinners is available to us on street level. On gutter level if that's where we're living.

God run to meet us. Wesley says in one of his hymns how swiftly didst thou run to save a fallen race. That's what he did in Jesus.

It's God run to meet us. Oh the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary. The gulf has been spanned then and that's Jesus.

And so it was that that son who thought that because it was a long way out it would be a long way back discovered it wasn't a long way back at all. It was a quick way back. And this is my word of best news for this morning.

I agree with you. It is a long way out. Man has taken you even though you're a youngster.

A long time for you to get as far away as you had. And you can imagine because it was a long time out it's going to be a long time back. And it led such a long way back you can hardly get yourself to stop.

But it's not true. A long way out, yes. But I want to tell you it's a quick way back.

And I'll tell you why you think it's a long way out and why it's actually a quick way back. Because it was sin that took you away you got the impression it would be good it would bring you back. How much good? And for how long? Will you keep it up? It isn't true.

It's a long way out because of sin but it's a quick way back because of the blood of Jesus. Out by sin! But back if you get back at all by the power of the precious blood. I cannot tell you how what that's meant to me in my personal day-to-day life up to this day.

Oh, I thank God for that quick way back! I'm astonished! I've been in bad shape! I've manifested wrong attitudes sometimes! I've been tripped up into perhaps wrong imaginations Oh, how the devil can trip up even a preacher! I've been so ashamed of myself! And I say, oh God, I'm all wrong. And the next moment I'm leading somebody to Jesus. I think this isn't right.

I should have been stood in the corner for the days instead of which such is the mighty power of the blood of Jesus the moment I caught sin soon. I'm back. Some of you know my friend George Verver the founder of Operation Mobilisation I heard him give his testimony.

When he first started giving out Christian literature on the streets of Los Angeles he was doing it on his own and he found himself in a very sleazy district of that city. And he saw there advertised a striptease show. He'd never been to a striptease show.

He said, I wonder what it's like, it looks. Well, I'll have a look. And that Christian went and sat down in a striptease show.

Until God spoke to him. Oh God, what have they been doing? And he got up and fled that theatre. He didn't know how to get right with God.

And he saw a telephone kiosk across the road. And he went to that kiosk he lifted the receiver and he made his confession to God on the telephone. And he got through.

I don't know what dial number he dialed but it was the right one. And there he had the answer. A voice that spoke peace to the sinner.

Completely restored. But the point, the sequel is this. A half an hour later he led a man to Jesus Christ on the sidewalks of Los Angeles.

He would have thought if it was a long way out it would be a long way back. But he found there was precious blood. The blood sprinkled day on which every failure has been anticipated and settled to the satisfaction of God even before it's committed.

It was a quick way back. And so it can be for you a long way out. But oh praise God a quick way back.

Because you come back by the way of the blood. Jesus did it all. All to him I owe.

There doesn't need to be a time lag. I am told in my hearing the mighty sufficiency of the blood of Jesus Christ. And it is good enough for God.

It is certainly enough for me and my failings. And back you are. Washed, forgiven, cleansed, restored with liberty to enter the holiest by it's power.

And so it is even while you are a great way off. You can be reconciled to God. You can get right with him.

Or there may be adjustments to be made afterwards but you are going to make them as one who has already been restored. Not as one who is yet to be restored. You don't make those adjustments.

You don't even put things right with another and ask their forgiveness. In order to be made right with God you have been made right with God at the cross. And as a result you want things right and sweet between you and others.

And so there it is. While God seems to be in his confrontations a great way off you can come. And what an encouragement to come if you are going to be treated like this.

Those of us who are still lost or had been maybe it's happened already sitting in your seat. Or those of us yes we know what it is to be saved but oh, oh, oh you are not a happy Christian this morning. And there is a reason for it.

And you know what it is. It's what you have been thinking about the whole of this morning. Own up.

And you have hardly got the first letter of sorry out of your heart before he runs to meet you. So quick. I praise the Lord for the quick way back.

Let us pray.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/22/SID22321.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/roy-hession/when-he-was-a-great-way-off/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net