



**If You are Risen with Christ...
GCSP – 03/22/2008**

In all walks of life, in all professions, in all industries, in all families, in all governments and countries, and in all schools and churches, there is a certain expected behavior from those involved in each of these groups.

If you are elected to political office, the public expects you to behave properly. If you are a member of a church you are expected to behave in the manner of a Christian. If you are enrolled at a prestigious university there are certain codes of conduct you are expected to follow. The place of business you have worked at over the years has an expectation that you will represent the company well.

Regardless of what organizations or people groups you are part of, you are expected to behave accordingly.

I mentioned being a member of a church but I want to take it a step further; you can be a member of a church and not be a true Christian. Tonight as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, I want to briefly deal with the expected behavior of a true saved, born-again Christian.

Turn with me to a familiar story in the gospel of Luke.

Luke 15:11-32

Let's pray.

The story of the Prodigal Son is probably one of the most well-known stories of the Bible. Many unbelievers who never open a Bible can tell you at least parts of this story. But I submit to you that through the centuries the focus of this story has been misplaced by most who have read it and even by most who have taught it. For the prodigal son is only one of three main characters; and each character has tremendous lessons and depth of meaning for us to consider.

We will not have time to fully develop this story for there are only a few specific applications I wish to draw out this evening, but suffice to say this story should more properly be called, "A Tale of a Father and Two Sons."

The original audience that Jesus is speaking to in a group known as the Pharisees. Prior to this story Jesus told two other stories that are very closely connected. He told a story about a lost sheep and a story about a lost coin before telling the story about a lost son. In each of the three stories there is great rejoicing when the lost is finally found, but it is not until the last story that Jesus undeniably drives His point home to the unbelieving Pharisees.

In our story tonight, the father represents God, the prodigal represents the sinner who comes to repentance and salvation, and the older son represents the Pharisees, or the religious unbelievers.

Let's quickly develop the story.

v. 11-12

In the ancient Middle Eastern culture this would have been scandalous behavior. The estate was never divided while the father was still alive. As they listened, the Pharisees would have been outraged at this request and even more outraged that the father granted the request. This was tantamount to the son saying, "Father, I wish you were dead so I could have my money!"

The father was to be honored while he was still living and breathing. The Law even goes so far as to command rebellious children to be stoned to death. So for a son to dishonor his father in this way was unacceptable.

But even with such unacceptable behavior, the father grants his request and divides the estate between his two sons. This being the younger son, he only received half of what his older brother received.

v. 13

After getting his affairs in order and after converting his part of the estate into cash, the younger son sets out on his own. He travels far enough away that nobody would know who he was and then the party began. And he blows every last dime on "loose living." Later in the story we find that included in this loose living was hiring prostitutes. Jesus does not reveal any further sordid details but I'm sure our imaginations can fill in the blanks. The bottom line is the younger son wasted all of it.

v. 14

When the money dried up so too did his new friends. The young son is now destitute, homeless, and hungry; and to top it off a severe famine has overcome the land. In times of famine jobs are scarce if not non-existent in agricultural economies. He is now at the end of his proverbial rope.

v. 15

The phrasing "**hired himself**" is not the best way to understand the situation. Literally it should read he attached himself or joined himself to one of the citizens of that country. The picture is similar to the scenes you see on television in third world countries where the little children run up to you on the streets and tug at your pant legs or shirt sleeves looking for a handout. Joining yourself to someone did not necessarily mean you were going to be paid. Times were desperate so the utterly destitute would join themselves to someone on the slim chance he would get a meal or a place to sleep.

v. 16

This citizen finally tells the son to go into his fields and feed his pigs. The implication is that if wanted to fight with the pigs to eat some of the slop then dig in.

At this point the Pharisees would have to be in an uproar. Pigs were unclean according to the Law. A Jewish man could not go near pigs let alone be down in the mud fighting to eat alongside of them. This was as humiliating as it could possibly get for a Jewish man. And I am sure the Pharisees were appalled that Jesus was even suggesting a Jew would find himself in this position.

The young son indeed did not receive any pay for his labor and he also received nothing from anyone else. He was now just a common beggar and times were such that nobody was giving anything to beggars.

Before we move on in the story let's make a few observations and applications.

First, if you desire to disobey and even despise the Father, He will allow it. God is not going to stop you from rebelling against Him. God will not force you to believe in Him or obey Him.

Secondly, God will allow you to run away from home as far as you desire. He won't set a boundary and tell you "That's far enough."

Thirdly, God will not limit the extent of your sin. You can indulge in as much "loose living" as you want and God will not intervene and tell you to stop it.

Fourthly, God will allow you to suffer the consequences of your actions. You will reap what you sow – and that is an iron-clad promise of Scripture.

But praise God we don't have to stay in our sin. We don't have to wallow around with the pigs forever.

v. 17

The young son comes to his senses. He remembers home. He recalls how there was always plenty of food even for the servants. He realizes that his father's servants live in luxury compared to his current situation. This son has seen and lived through the consequences of his rebellion long enough and his thoughts return to his father.

God is patiently waiting for all unbelievers to come to their senses.

v. 18-19

In all humility the young son sets out to repent of his sins. He does not expect to be reinstated as his father's son but only desires to be a slave in his father's household. He now understands the truth that it is better to spend one day in the Father's house than thousands elsewhere.

This is the beautiful picture of salvation. When you humbly come to Jesus in repentance and submit to Him as the Lord and Master of your life; that is the day salvation will come to you.

Romans 10:9, says, "**that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.**"

v. 20a

The young son put action to his words and thoughts, and he got up and journeyed back to his father's house. He could not be saved from his desperate situation by wishing and hoping. He could not be accepted back into the father's good graces by continuing in his sin. He had to get up and draw near to the father.

I preached several weeks ago the fact that the level and depth of our relationship with God is within our control. If we will take the steps to draw near to Him He will take the steps to draw near to us. And the thing of it is, we take human steps, He takes God steps.

That was the younger son's story; now the father's story.

v. 20b

This is important. When a son had disgraced his father and returned home in that culture, the custom was that the son would have to sit in the city for several days. The people of the city would then curse him, revile him, and even spit on him until the father came to collect him. This was how despicable it was to disgrace and dishonor your father in that culture.

But the father sees him in the distance and runs through the city to his son. This was totally unexpected behavior from the father. The people of the city would have been in shock that the father was not only accepting his son back with open arms, but that he was running through the city. Noblemen did not run; it was not considered proper.

But the father not only runs to his son to protect him from the abuse he was about to receive, but he hugs him and kisses him. His son was as filthy and dirty as you could imagine. The stench and odor had to be overwhelming. But the father didn't care about any of that. He didn't care what the people of the city thought of him or his son; he didn't care about his son's appearance; he didn't care about how his son smelled; he only cared that his son was back!

God the Father is the same way toward you! When you come to Him in repentance and belief, He could care less about your past. He doesn't care how low you have been, He doesn't care about how much sin has dirtied your life, and He doesn't care about how much the sin of this world has defiled you. All He cares about is that you have come to Him.

v. 21-24

The son confesses his sins before the father and the father immediately wraps a robe around him, puts a ring on his finger and puts sandals on his feet.

Don't miss the significance of this. The robe was the robe of honor. The robe was only worn by the head of the household on very special occasions. The robe was reserved for times of great celebration and honor. By putting the robe on his younger son he was bestowing on him the father's honor. The imagery and meaning of this would not have been missed by the Pharisees, for they loved to be seen in flowing robes. This was the ultimate honor being bestowed on the repentant son.

The ring represented authority. A ring in that culture was a signet ring. It had the family seal imbedded on it and would be used to conduct the family's business. Any official papers or documents would be rolled up and sealed with wax. The signet ring would then be pressed down into the soft wax to authorize that it was official and from this household. He who wore the ring had the same authority as the father of the household.

The sandals represented responsibility and relationship. Only the family wore sandals. The slaves and servants went barefoot in that culture. Wearing sandals signified that you were related to the father. It also indicated responsibility to represent the father. Sandals indicated you were going and doing on behalf of the father.

As children of our Heavenly Father, we too have been given the Father's honor, the Father's authority, and the Father's responsibility and relationship. If you are a genuine, saved, born-again Christian tonight, you are a child of the King and you have all the resources and benefits that the King has bestowed on you! There is no need to walk through this life moving from one pity party to the next. You have the honor, the authority, the responsibility, and the relationship of God the Father; and acting any differently is flat out foolish!

And after the son is honored with the robe, ring and sandals, the Father throws a celebration to dwarf all celebrations. The son has returned!

This is a picture of the father. The third character in our story takes up the rest of the chapter. The older son again represents the Pharisees – those who put on the appearance of being a son of the father but their actions betray them.

v. 25-27

Now at this point you would hope the older brother is also excited to see his brother again and that he simply joined in on the celebration.

v. 28

The older son is ticked off because this celebration is costing him money. Remember, the father had divided the estate. When the father died, everything would belong to the older son now; the younger son had already received his portion.

The father pleads with his older son to no avail.

v. 29-30

Jealousy rears its ugly head. He is the one who should be honored not his younger brother.

v. 31-32

The father reiterates that the older son has access to all that the father has.

The Pharisees had access to God the Father's riches and grace just as much as any other repentant sinner. Everyone here has that same access.

The story comes to an abrupt ending. There should be more. The older son still has to respond to make this story complete. Why did Jesus not complete the story?

Because the Pharisees were the ones who would complete the story.

The story was completed when the Pharisees nailed Jesus to the Cross. They refused what the Father offered and instead killed Him.

And praise God, Jesus rose from the dead and is forever in His rightful place on the throne.

When we, like the younger son, come to our senses and repent of our sins and appropriate Jesus as Lord and Master of our lives, the Bible says we are risen with Him to a new life.

That was the introduction – but don't be worried, the message will be quick. Turn with me in your Bibles to **Colossians 2**.

Colossians 2:20-3:4

Beloved, the bottom line for those of us who are genuine Christians is this: If you have been raised to new life in Christ, then live like it!

Stop allowing the world to influence your life. Stop allowing foolish traditions and ceremony to impeded your worship. Stop living life according to the whims and wishes of men. Stop doing things for the sake of appearances. Stop trying to live as if you deserve honor, and authority, and responsibility and relationship, and start living your life as the child of the King that you are who already has all of these things!

Most Christians walk around as if they are on the losing side of life when Jesus has already won the victory for us! We are victorious! We are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ our Lord!

This life is not to be lived in defeat and despair. You dishonor the Father when you choose to mope around.

Beloved, you are God the Father's child! You have His honor, His authority, and you can have as close and as personal of a relationship with Him as you desire; and you have been commissioned with the responsibility to represent Him to the world.

For those who may not have come to repentance and belief as of yet, the choice is yours. You can align yourself with the younger son and live you life as a true child of God the Father, or you can align yourself with the older son and the Pharisees who wanted the Father out of the way so they could do things their own way.

Let's pray.