

“Restored to a Relationship With God: Full Acceptance”

Luke 15:11-24

4/11-12/09
6 pm; 9 & 10:45 am

Series: “*Restored!*”

INTRODUCTION

When people think about Christianity, sometimes the word “*religion*” is what comes to mind. “*Religion*” in the sense of a system of creeds and beliefs, or an organization that focuses on rules and regulations.

But, the Bible ... without any question at all ... the Bible equates Christianity with “*relationship*.” Christianity is about *relationships*. The Bible says God loves us. Love speaks of *relationship*. Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God ... a *relationship*. He said the second greatest command is to love people ... *relationships*.

As we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, it’s so important that we grasp that at the very core of the reason for Jesus’ death and resurrection is *relationships* ... about God making a way for you and me to be in a *relationship* with Him; connected to Him and bonded together with Him.

Jesus died and rose to life to bring about the restoration of the *relationship* between every person and God.

One of the stories that Jesus told to illustrate how much God loves us – and His heart for restoring our relationship with Him – is the story of a father and his younger son.

OPEN to Luke 15:11 (**PAGE** 1624)

READ Luke 15:11-24

The first part of the story speaks of ...

I. Rejection (v. 11-13) (a broken relationship)

In verse 12, the younger son says to his father, “**Father, give me my share of the estate.**”

Just like now, an inheritance was not normally given until a father’s death; so, to ask for it early would be a tremendous insult to the father. It would be like saying, “I wish you were dead so I could have your money.”

This son was callously rejecting his father; making it clear all he wanted was his money.

In spite of the painful rejection, the father divided the property between his sons.

Why? Was he crazy? Remember ... this is symbolizing God with us ... and when we reject Him, He lets us go our own way.

The younger son took his inheritance, left home, went as far away as he could, “**and there squandered his wealth in wild living.**”

He moved from Massachusetts to Las Vegas and spent his inheritance on drunkenness, strip shows, prostitutes, laying down \$10,000 bets on the roulette wheel ...

He threw away his inheritance, lived for the moment, not a thought for tomorrow ... or eternity.

But after months, maybe years of this kind of living, the money ran out and then came ...

II. Reality (set in) (v. 14-16)

The money is gone and next comes a famine. The son has a real problem on his hands. He's reduced to poverty and the absolute basics: he needs food.

So he gets the only job he can find; feeding pigs. This kind of job was humiliating for a Jewish man because pigs were considered an unclean animal. So his job was dishonorable and shameful.

And if that isn't bad enough, he's still hungry. He's not being paid enough to satisfy his hunger, so he starts craving the pig food.

This young man has sunk to the lowest possible state, he doesn't have a cent to his name, he's working for a Gentile, tending pigs and longing to eat their slop.

He's walking the streets of Las Vegas, picking through the garbage to survive.

This is the reality that rejection of God brings to our lives. It is a down-hill ride, it is hard, and it ultimately leads to isolation and pain ... even if we have money, even if we have position, even if we're in the spotlight. At some point it gets really old and we're empty, used up, and far from God. That's reality.

But, thankfully, even when we're in the midst of the worst, at the very bottom of our pit, there is still hope.

III. Repentance (v. 17-19)

(Repentance means to change your thinking, to reverse it)

The son finally sees himself and his situation for what they are. He is where he is because of his own self-centeredness, his own decisions.

The reality of the consequences of rejecting his father is clear. He not only caused his father the deepest of pain, he also violated God's law by trashing him. It's the reason he's in the pathetic situation he's in.

As he faces himself, he realizes that he doesn't deserve to be called his father's son anymore.

Seeing his actions for what they are, and seeing himself as he really is, he decides to return home, to admit how wrong he has been, and to ask if his father will forgive him. Maybe his dad will hire him on as a servant.

He isn't going to ask or expect his father to accept him as his son. He is going humbly ... swallowing his pride ... returning to the place where he'd been so cold-hearted, where everyone knew what he had done.

He would place himself in his father's hands, admitting his sin, asking only for forgiveness, mercy and a servant's job.

Sometimes it takes this kind of devastating situation to bring us to our senses, to help us see ourselves as we really are.

For me, it took having my knee blown out, followed by a botched surgery, and losing what I valued most.

So, the son heads home, his plan firmly in mind. But what he finds amazes him. He encounters ...

IV. Reconciliation and Restoration (v. 20-24, 32)

At this part in the story, we see how the father has processed his son's rejection. He knows his son has set God aside, and as a result, set him aside. He knows he's been captured by foolishness and selfishness and he's paying a price.

We read that he sees his son while he is still a long way off ... that means *he was looking for him*, hoping he would return. He was looking down the road his son had taken into absolute foolishness, praying for the day he would come to his senses and come home.

He saw his son while he was still a long way off ... He recognized the gait of the man walking his way, it was just how his son walked ... and as he watched, he realized it was him; it was his son!

And he was **filled with compassion**.

Instead of a having a resentful, demeaning attitude, he was filled with **compassion** for his son, and before he knew it, he was running towards him. When he reached him, he threw his arms around him and kissed his head. I'm sure there were tears running down his eyes.

The son is still broken and humble, he says, **“Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”**

But, before he could ask to become a servant, his father calls to his servants to bring

the best robe (probably the father's, showing full acceptance back in the family and covering the son's filthy clothing)

a ring for his finger (the family ring)

sandals for his feet. (sons wear sandals, servants are barefooted)

The father receives his son back into the family, fully restored, fully accepted. And then, in his overwhelming joy, he throws a big celebration, a feast! His lost son had been found!

This is the picture of God's compassion and joy when a son or daughter returns to Him... when you return to Him!

ILLUSTRATION

“Joe Bayly, a Christian author, has a son named Tim. Joe's fathering consisted primarily of arguments and rules, and eventually Tim left home, left his faith, and lived a wild life with others he met in Chicago. Tim's rebellion broke his father's heart.

Late one night, Joe got a phone call. ‘This is the police,’ the voice on the other line said. ‘Your son was arrested for a DUI. We have him here in the town jail.’ Joe got out of bed and drove half an hour to the jail where his son was being held. When he got there, they told him that his son wasn't there. Joe thought he had driven to the wrong place, so he drove to the next town, the next town after that, and the next town after that.

Finally, around 4:00 am, Joe decided to drive to the old house in Chicago where he knew Tim had been sleeping. The door wasn't locked, so he stepped inside and looked for his son. In the faint light of the darkened room, he saw him asleep in a sleeping bag that was

strewn across an old mattress. He walked over to the mattress and stood over Tim. Then, moved with compassion, he bent down, lightly kissed Tim on the cheek, and left.

In the months that followed, Tim started visiting his parents. He also returned to church and recommitted his life to Christ.

Years later, Joe finally asked his son what made him want to come back home. Tim looked at his dad and said, ‘Don’t you know? Remember that night, years ago, when you got a call that I was in jail? Dad, that was my friend. It was a prank. When you came to the house, I only pretended to be asleep. I knew you’d driven all night in the cold, and I wondered what you were going to do to me. And all you did was bend down and kiss me on the cheek. Dad, the kiss brought me back.’”

Jesus’ death and resurrection are about relationships ... our relationship with God, and our relationships with one another.

Colossians 2:13-14 “You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins.

14 He canceled the record that contained the charges against us. He took it and destroyed it by nailing it to Christ’s cross.”

“Father in Heaven, thank You for sending Jesus to die for my sins, and then raise to live, overcoming sin and death. I invite Jesus into my life to forgive me, indwell me and direct my life. Thank You for loving me and restoring me! Amen!”