

THE HOMECOMING

Sermonette by Robert Schmid

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Back in February during a bible study, the statement was made that in 1989, 484 former members returned to the Church of God. Now it didn't say how many fell away, and did not return, maybe many more, but that doesn't diminish the fact that 484 people who fell away, returned, and are back in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, back in the fellowship of the Family of God.

That is cause to rejoice!

In the parable of the lost sheep Christ said that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, then over ninety nine righteous persons who need no repentance. And in the parable of the lost coin Christ said that there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

The classic example of what I am talking about is of course found in the parable of "the lost son", also known as the parable of "the prodigal son".

Some of you younger ones may be asking: What's a prodigal son anyhow? And furthermore, since it speaks of sons, does that mean all girls all ladies can go to sleep? Well not at all, the message of the prodigal son is to everybody, male and female, young and old, it's an issue that is apropos whether you are in the Church or in the world.

The definition of a prodigal son is "one who spends or gives lavishly and foolishly." In other words -" a spendthrift." One who spends more than he has, one who is in places where he shouldn't be A "prodigal" is one who is lost, both physically, mentally, and spiritually.

The account of the prodigal son is found in Luke the 15th chapter verses 11-32. I am not going to read the account, for I want to focus primarily on the sequence of events. What is the sequence of events? Well,

First of all there is the state of "**Dependence**"
Secondly there is the state of "**Independence**"
Thirdly there is the state of "**Repentance**" and
Fourth there is what I call the "**Home Coming**".

Lets look at each of these 4 stages a little closer:

It starts the same way for all of us. We find ourselves in a state of total dependency. That is from conception until birth we are all completely dependent upon our mother who carries us. After birth we are still dependent for many years on our parents or other humans to feed and clothes us, to provide shelter, and to teach us.

In the parable it simply says in verse 11: *"There was a man who had two sons"* That says it all. Sons who obviously grew up in a state of **dependency** while in the fathers house. They probably took it for granted, as most of us do, that their parents provided for them, that they lovingly cared for them, often to the point of sacrifice, that they were always there when they needed them. And so, instead of honoring them and being grateful, we read in verse 12: *"and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.'" And he probably added , "and give it to me now!"* Ah, there is a wonderful, selfish approach!

Here then is the point were one of the sons says to himself, to his parents, and to the world: I am no longer **dependent**, I am now **independent**. I will no longer subject myself to my parents or to anybody else. I will make my own decisions and the first decision I am making is to get out of this house, and so, *"he gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country."*

The wonderful state of **independence**. How wonderful is it?

The dictionary says it is a state "not subject to control by others, a state of self governing." In other words : I don't need you father, I don't need you mom, brother, sister, neighbor. You know where this kind of attitude leads to, the inevitable - I don't need you God!

And so we read in verse 14-16: *"About the time his money was gone a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him to feed his pigs. And he became so hungry that even the pods - the husks he was feeding the swine looked good to him. And no one gave him anything."*

You know why we don't eat any pork? Why Israel, didn't have any pigs? I used to live in the country. I know what pigs are like. It's because swine are filthy, dirty, greedy and noisy. He found himself living and eating with the pigs. He traded the house of his father for a stall of pigs.

He found himself in a *lost*, in a *sinful* condition.

But let's not be too hard on the fellow. You and I may wear fancy clothes and have plenty to eat, but if we find ourselves involved in pornography, homosexuality, adultery or any other continuous sin, we are no better off than this fellow.

And so the stage is set for the next state, the state of **"repentance."**

Just as his affliction was the greatest, he remembers his fathers house. And so in verse 17-19, when he finally came to his senses, he said to himself: *"At home even the hired men have food enough and to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say: 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man.'" True repentance? You bet.*

Not only did he come to his senses and recognized his sinful state, but he was prepared to do something about it. He said: *"I will go home."* That's action. In addition he acknowledged that he sinned against his father, but not only his father, but also against heaven - he realized that he sinned against God, and he was prepared to accept the consequences. *"Please take me on as a hired hand."*

Now comes step No. 4, my favorite, I call it: "**The Home Coming.**" I love the Home Coming.

Notice first of all in verse 20-21: *"And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming and he had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" What a wonderful picture, the father taking the initiative. Not one word of condemnation, bowls of mercy, the fathers love in action - he kissed him - all was forgiven.*

And so we read in verse 22-24: *"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry."*

A perfect picture, well almost, except that there is a troublemaker in every crowd. Here we have the older brother who, as it says in verse 28, *"was angry and refused to go in."* Now what kind of attitude is this? Can you imagine how his younger brother must have felt when he found out that his big brother was angry and refused to come in and talk to him?

But more importantly, lets ask ourselves: Is it possible that we could display a similar attitude to a son or daughter who is returning home again? Or could it be possible that we are simply indifferent to the fact that 484 individuals have returned to the Family of God? Well, not only is it possible, but the parable plainly shows us that there is always at least one in the crowd who represents the pharisaical attitude of the older brother.

But fortunately, for all of us, in verse 28, His father came out and entreated him, he pleaded with his older son, and even though the son tried to argue his case, the father prevailed upon him saying in verse 31: *"Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found."*

Here we see the fathers compassion and understanding with his older son, who by the way, we must assume, accepted his fathers plea, and was reconciled with his brother.

The Home Coming; I just love the story! But you know why I really get so excited about this story? It's because I know that my heavenly Father is waiting, with outstretched arms, for me, ready to forgive me, ready to embrace me, and put a ring on my hand, and a royal robe on my shoulders. Ready to take me and every one of you into the wonderful spiritual Family of God and make us kings and priests for all eternity.

Now you know why I love the parable of the prodigal son, it's because I am looking forward to an incredible "**Home Coming.**"