

## **FINDING OUR PLACE IN HIS HOME**

Luke 15: 11-32 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson -- Youth Snow Camp

Read only Luke 15: 11—“And Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons.”

Each of you may find our subject tonight the most challenging message of all. Why? It's because, if we could divide all of us up tonight, many of us would claim, “I've found my place in God's home. I'm saved.” The rest of you might say, “Well, I haven't been saved or born again yet, but I'm considering it, and then I'll be home with Him.” The sad part of both of these responses is that both responses don't seem to understand what it really means to know your place in God's home. An old Kellogg's Corn Flakes commercial first used in 1990, 23 years ago, was, “Taste them again for the first time.” If I could package that image in tonight's message, it would mean that all of you would recognize that finding your place in His home, God's home, is far more than being born again, as miraculous and necessary as that is. Once we are saved, God wants the Gospel to be about more than our initial salvation experience. The Lord Jesus wants the Gospel in our lives to be about our everyday life with Jesus, a continual melody in which we are at home with Jesus, and He is welcome and at home in our lives. It is almost like many of us who have been saved for quite a while, have become addicted to the duty of being Christians. For years we have heard and believed and received the words of the Gospel, but we seem to have never heard the music of what it means to know the grace of living with Jesus, in His presence, in His home.

Many of you may have come to Snow Camp with the thought, “I already know the Gospel! That's the basic stuff, the ABC's that Jesus is God, Creator, Savior, and Lord. I've got the message.” When you heard me read our text about the prodigal son, you said in your mind, “Goodness sake. Everybody knows that story. It's as familiar as the story of the three little pigs or the song about three blind mice. This isn't good news; this is old news.” Did you know what a sensitive pastor notices when he starts to speak about a familiar subject? You guessed it. He sees the look in many eyes, as eyes start to glaze over. It's the glaze of familiarity. Since most of us think we understand the Gospel of Christ, we fail to realize we may have only scratched the surface in understanding the impact Jesus wants to make in our lives when we find our place at home with Him. Just because we have tasted to see the Lord is good, doesn't mean we all have found our place in His home. Finding our place in His home is more than a scratch and sniff experience.

As I was working on this message, I got a call from a couple I have been counseling with for quite a while. They are at the end of their rope again. It isn't the first, second or third time. They are saved from hell. They know Jesus, but they

haven't come to find their place in God's home. One of them said to me on the phone, "No one cares." Knowing our place in God's home is so much more than just faithfully going to church, reading our Bible at times, and trying to keep being good. Knowing our place in God's home is much more than not doing bad things—Don't lie, steal, lust, be greedy, or worship idols. What does it mean to find our place in God's home? At this point in my preparing of this message, I knew my place as a pastor and shepherd was to leave the church building and go to a home in Rock Springs. They wouldn't leave their house. Knowing my place at home with God on Wednesday was all about keeping a sense of fluid priorities and knowing at that moment I had to drop everything and go to a family where one of them was saying, "No one cares." God wanted me to be His ambassador to say, "I care. Many people care and are praying for you two. Someone loves you more than I do or any others at the church do. That Someone is Jesus. He died for you. He wants you to enjoy His abundant life." So, I left the church, not upset that I was failing in my duties, but knowing at that exact moment, it was my privilege to go attempt to help a couple keep from breaking up and leaving each other, and to even try to stop one of them from committing suicide. There's so much more to finding our place in God's home than just coming into His house or coming to Snow Camp. There's so much more to finding our place in God's home, than having Jesus come into our lives and then leaving Him standing just inside the door, while we go about our business as usual.

As I was meditating on what to preach to you about this remarkable story of Jesus, I realized this story is a bit like the peril in the little song, "Three blind mice, three blind mice, see how they run; see how they run. They all ran after the farmer's wife. She cut off their tails with a carving knife; did you ever see such a sight in your life, as three blind mice?" In this pitiful story of Jesus, known as the story of the prodigal son, I see: "Two lost sons, two lost sons, see how they run, see how they run, they both ran away from their Father's home, they sinned against Him, were afraid and alone; did you ever see such pitiful ones, as two lost sons?" Yes, the younger son was lost, away from His Father's home in a far country. The older son was lost, away from His Father's home, but living in His Father's house. There is an excellent chance all of us here today may find ourselves identifying with either the older or the younger son. Is it possible any of us here today are lost, away from our Father's home? Let's examine the two pictures.

**THE LOST YOUNGER SON, AWAY FROM HIS FATHER'S HOME IN A FAR COUNTRY.** (I.) Notice with me Luke 15: 11-24. And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give

me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt 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.’ 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 fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.”

**Why was the younger son lost from His Father’s home?** He was blind, blind, blind, blind as a bat, spiritually blind. You know the song, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.” The only way to be saved is to learn the truth God’s Word teaches in a required course called, “Spiritual Blindness 101.” Have you ever heard the expression, “Wake up and smell the coffee?” This American idiom means “pay attention and do something about a situation.” You may have heard your parents say something like, “Wallace Jeffrey Hodder III, things are not going to change in this household until you kindly and promptly and willingly and sweetly take out the trash. Wake up and smell the coffee.” (or) “Alice Agnes Shelalee, your room is a wreck. You won’t be going to the ball game until you make your bed and clean it up. Wake up and smell the coffee.” Or parents, you may have heard it said, perhaps by the Lord; it goes something like this: “John and Becky Ridgeway, don’t close your eyes to what is happening with your teenagers. They are watching pornography, lying about doing their homework and flunking out of school while you argue over who put the toilet paper up backwards. Wake up and smell the coffee.”

Blindness makes us run away from God. We don’t know how good it is in His presence. We want to sell our birthright for a mess of pottage. We want thrills. We want to try our hand at skiing the black diamonds, skiing double Black Diamonds,

holding our poles in our right hand while videotaping our progress with our left hand - Ripsaw! Extreme Skiing. The problem is—we haven't even been down this mountain before and we haven't made it through beginner's lessons. We want to go out with a fellow three years older than us, girls, we're 16 and he's 19 and he isn't saved and he has a reputation for getting what he wants in life. The problem is fellows, we may want to try dating a girl by following the instructions we learned on a website called "Getting Your Own Way On Every Date." That's exactly like the road this younger brother went on. It's a bobsled and a luge going at breakneck speed to the far country. That's being a free radical, with prodigal blindness.

**Why did the younger son want to come home?** He woke up too late, finding out the hard way how pitiful life can quickly get to be in a far country. While there's money, it seems like a walk in the park. When you are sleeping under the viaduct on I-80 or under the bridge next to Albertson's and eating out of dumpsters, it isn't coffee you smell. All of a sudden, and hopefully, before death, you come to yourself. (Luke 15: 17) We all have to come to ourselves, and face ourselves before we can go Home to Jesus, to find our place in His home. By this time, our lives are often so wasted and ruined, we make up our speech and it goes at lot like the prodigal son. We plan to tell the Lord, "Father, I have sinned too terribly to explain. If you'd only consider letting me sleep in the garage or in the corncrib, I'll wash windows, clean out septic tanks, and be the chimney sweep for all your ranch houses. I don't want any free lunch. I'll work for all I get. Just let me come home as a hired hand." God won't hear of it. He runs to meet us, greets us with a bear hug embrace, weeps for joy, dresses us like royalty, throwing away our raggedy and stinking clothes, and He throws a celebration party. God is not only God, Creator, Savior, and Lord. He is also Father. He wants repentant sons and daughters. He has a place in His home for every son or daughter who gives up trying the world's way and comes Home. No prodigal is happy, joyful, and fulfilled until he is doing God's will, whatever God has planned and he has sworn off running away from home, ever again. A come home prodigal may be God's choice for witnessing on a school basketball team, or His choice to be an artist who testifies for Him at art shows. A come home prodigal may be God's soon to be housewife, married to her dream husband, raising children for Jesus, children she leads to trust Jesus. A come home prodigal may be a young man who quits looking first on the outward appearance for his dream girl, and first starts looking at the heart of a woman of God until he falls in love, gets married and God brings him beautiful children to raise for Jesus—beautiful children like his beautiful bride. Let's take a few moments to look at the second lost son.

**THE LOST OLDER SON, AWAY FROM HIS FATHER’S HOME, BUT LIVING IN HIS FATHER’S HOUSE.** (II.) Notice with me, Luke 15: 25-32.

“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

**Why was the older son lost from his Father’s home?** He was blind, blind, blind, blind as a bat, spiritually blind. Oh, he took the mandatory course, Spiritual Blindness 101, but he always flunked it or made D’s and F’s because he was sure the course wasn’t about him. He usually tried to be good. He tried to do what his father asked him. He tried to never cause his dad too much grief. This older son however, never knew that one of the major dangers of trying to be good is that it blinds us to our own sinfulness. If we have victory over lust, it blinds us to how greedy we are, living right there in our Father’s house, going to church, Sunday School, and Prayer Meeting, but never finding our place in our Father’s home. As long as the older son was making his own list and checking it twice, to see if he was naughty or nice, he felt holy. The older brother knew the sins of his younger brother, getting drunk and partying with wine, women and song. He knew he wasn’t guilty of the big deadly five sins of doing drugs, drunkenness, sexual immorality, murder and worshipping idols. But what sins had he conveniently left off his list, like spiritual pride, lust, gossip, materialism, loving the world, disobedience to parents, disrespect, dishonesty, bitterness, envy, jealousy, secret pornography, and wrathful anger? Perhaps one of the worst sins of the older brother was the contempt he had for his lost younger brother who squandered his father’s inheritance and came home as a miserable wretch to confess his sins. This proud older brother refused to celebrate his younger brother’s return to his father’s house. Legalistic older brothers won’t celebrate lost sons coming to Jesus. This man had no concept of grace. He was a performance son—“Look at all these many years I have slaved for you, and (listen to the bitterness he had with his father) “You never killed a heifer and threw a party for me.” This older son obviously hadn’t found God’s home in his father’s house. He served only because of duty,

and not from desire. He could have been found serving as a beloved son, but he insisted on serving as a hired servant, an employee. Thus the older son, acting as an employee, didn't get to experience the missing love he felt with his father, because he kept his dad at arm's length. He saw his dad as a slave driver never satisfied, but that was his sinful, foolish, blind, blind, blind perception.

The older son was trying to earn the love that was already his had he had the wisdom, repentance and grace to claim it. No older brother will ever latch onto his place in God's home, by comparing his performance with a wild child, with a loose cannon prodigal. Performance living at the house of the Father, acting as a hired employee drowns out the music of the Gospel. Sadly, there are two lost sons in this story of Jesus. One is lost in his sinful and wild stubbornness and rebellion while the other is lost in his goodness, his perceived goodness. Pastor, why do you call the older brother lost? I call him lost because he was just as blind as his younger brother, though blind while working hard, near to the father, rather than far away. He was blind in trying to work his way to a party. His father might have thrown a bigger party for him, had he ever truly come Home. This story may be way too familiar to you, but it's true. You can't earn what is already yours when you truly repent of sin. The hardest people to truly be saved are those who blindly think they are good because they see themselves as so good. Paul tells us in Ephesians 2: 8, 9, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." You can be like Avis Rent a Car, and say, "We try harder." Or you can do what both older and younger sons and daughters need to do, come to yourself and then come Home to Jesus.

The biblical record shows the younger son came home. The record leaves us crying for the older brother as his father entreats him kindly to come in and celebrate his younger brother's return. But no, he couldn't as he bitterly and proudly refused, while comparing himself with his younger brother. I call any of you tonight who are trying to make Christianity work, to repent and come Home to Jesus. Jesus is calling for you. Only He can make things work when we repent of our goodness, because all our righteousness is as filthy rags to Jesus. Do any of you here tonight need to find your place in God's home? Good people that come home may have more to repent of than truly bad people. Why? Nothing is more vile to God than thinking you are good while standing at the foot of the cross looking up at Jesus dying for you. If you are looking for your place in His Home, come Home now!