

The Servant



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The Story of the Prodigal son is a story of Grace. The son came to his senses. He was broken. He is humbled by his sin. He was repentant. His thoughts turned to his father and to his father's house. "I have sinned," Here is the beginning of a new creation. I am not worthy, woe – He hit the nail on the head. "Make me," he said. Here are all the ingredients for a miracle of grace. He tacks "works" on the end, just in case.

Religion does this often. "Make me as one of thy hired servants." Religion is quick to process that application in the church human resources department and "put us to work." We've got "hired" servants everywhere cleaning bathrooms, teaching Sunday School, serving on the Board of Elders. Their pay check is the assurance that they are somehow "paying" God back for their bad behavior, or proving that they are worthy.

The Prodigal would have gladly taken a place in the "bunk house." In the pig sty he realized how much better off his father's servants were than he. He would gladly go to work for his dad and have "enough to eat."

The problem with all this is it flies in the face of grace. Grace is free. There is no "fine" print in the articles of surrender. A broken hearted sinner who humbly turns for home is all that is necessary. We provide the sinner, and God provides the salvation.

Watch the father. He does not give his son the "cold treatment." We give the cold shoulder to those who have hurt or disappointed us. If they come back we want them to "suffer" some. After all, they caused us pain, now we want to "rub their nose in it, just a little." Man's love is not only conditional, it is very conditional. So is religion.

"Welcome, home," we say "but if you want to hang around here, now you have to be like one of the hired servants." "Now you have to, pay your dues." We then hand them a list of things that they must do to be "accepted" into God's family (or into our fellowship, which in our mind is the same thing).

You must be baptized, sign the church creed and annual pledge card. You must enroll in this, and join that. "On Tuesday we have an AA meeting for sinners such as yourself." "Oh yes, since you now work for us, we will be taking ten percent out of your pay check." Consider it Union dues. The lists churches have drafted are endless. These are all conditions of acceptance or of fellowship. Our men wear coats and ties, and our ladies wear hats. "If you don't like that, you might try the farm down the road. I hear they are hiring; but if you want to be "one of us..." and so it goes

I know that when we are in the pig pen, or on the operating table, or bobbing up and down in shark infested waters, we may be willing to "do" anything to be saved, but that is not how Grace works. Before throwing the life-preserver God does not ask "are you really, really sorry- enough to do whatever I ask from now on?" (This, by the way, is not Biblical repentance either).

The Prodigal never even made it home, before the Father rushed to hug and kiss him. In 1077 Henry IV was made to stand for three days barefoot in the snow at Canossa by Pope Gregory the VII- before the monarch was granted an audience. We do not have to stand barefoot in the snow. We have but to stand as a broken sinner beneath the crucified Christ. (Moses was asked to remove his shoes, not as a punishment, but, because he did not realize he was stepping into a holy place.) When we see the work Jesus did there on the cross for us, and hear the words He uttered- there will be no talk of putting your stuff in the bunk house. There will be no talk of "working of the bill" to settle accounts, as if our "washing dishes" will pay for the expense of killing the fatted calf. No, we are sons- ourselves unworthy- but knowing the Jesus has paid it all.

But, what about service? What about good works? Should the prodigal ever read his Bible he will discover we are not saved by good works, but for good works. "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." The amazing thing about grace is, it really works.

Man who Almost Joined the Church

“Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Matt. 19:16

Every religion, church, denomination and cult is built around the answer to this question. “What must I do to inherit eternal life.”

The pyramids of Egypt were man’s attempt to answer it. Pharaoh spent his life on earth getting for what he thought to be the next and eternal life.

Many a religion is simply another pyramid scheme to meet someone’s desire to fulfill the “what must I do.”

The rich young ruler, like many, were seeking a guarantee for eternity. He is the picture of every pastor or preacher’s dream. He was a “seeker.” Today every “Seeker Friendly” church would welcome him with open arms. Jesus sent him away “sorrowing.” This perplexed the disciples. Today the “Assimilation Pastor” at the local mega-church or the struggling pastor at the dying Faithful Remnant Church would be sorrowing as well.

I remember going fishing with an uncle. I got excited when the line went “taut.” I was beside myself when the fish broke the water and was hoisted into the boat. Then my uncle, (with one foot holding the fish still) removed the hook and

threw it back into the water. It was not big enough, he explained.

The rich young ruler was not the “fish that got away, he was the “fish that Jesus threw back into the water.”

Our churches are filled with fish that are not ready, fish that Jesus would have slipped back into the lake.

What a fish Jesus pulled in that day! What a catch, a rich young ruler. There are many reasons why he would have been given the “Right hand of Fellowship” in our own churches.

1. He was young. We have enough old people around here. The future of the church is with the young. Preacher, we need to do something to attract young people. Fun and games with a little Bible slipped in before they know it, but let’s do whatever it takes to get young people. The rich young ruler was a catch.

2. He was rich. The Holy Spirit made a point to call him “very” rich (Mk. 10). We have enough poor people, thank you. We have enough people looking for a hand-out. Besides, the disciples might have thought “the last time we had to pay taxes, we had to take a coin out of a fishes mouth.” Here is someone who could help us with the “bottom line” or to help us write a budget.

3. He was a ruler. The problem with our church is we don’t have leaders.

This fellow is a born leader. We could put him in charge of the men’s study class and teach men how to be leaders in the home.

4. He was enthusiastic

The Bible says he “ran.” We need some more enthusiasm around here. Sign him up.

5. He was interested in spiritual things.

He wants to talk about eternal life. That is rare.

6. He is a man. Our churches are all filled with women. (not that there is anything wrong with the sisters) we need some more men.

So why was he not ready? Why did the Lord “slip him back into the water.”

The answer was, he had no idea he was a sinner. Jesus’ “keep the commandments,” was met with “been there, done that.” He asked what “lack I yet?”

In order for salvation to take place, two things are necessary. First an Almighty God (the Lord Jesus) and second, a sinner. The rich young ruler did not think he was a sinner and he was under the illusion that he was good. “Only God is good,” said Jesus.

I grew up in a church that was filled with unsaved Rich Young Rulers. These days I am seeing more and more churches like the one I grew up in.

We are not out to “reach” youth, or yuppies, or men or women. Jesus sent us to find “sinners” and bring them to Him. ☹

Editor and Author- Ingimar DeRidder
5523 Newberry Dr. Raleigh, NC 27609
www.ingimar.com e-mail idr@ingimar.com

