**Jesus became Sin for our Salvation**

Based on [Luke 15:1-3,11-32](http://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk15.1) and [2 Corinthians 5:16-21](http://biblia.com/books/esv/2Co5.16-21)

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Lent 4

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Today we heard the beloved parable of the prodigal son. A son demands money from his father, runs off, and squanders it all. And when he hits rock bottom he says, "**I've got nothing left to lose. I'll go back to my father and work for him.**" And when he returns, his father doesn't get angry. Instead he's overwhelmed with joy, and welcomes his son back and throws him a feast. But the son's older brother won't celebrate; he's bitter because his father seems to be rewarding the prodigal son for having been disobedient and reckless. The father invites the older son to celebrate his brother's return, but he refuses because it's just not fair.

The parable, it is a wonderful story of a father's love, but it's not fair. It's not even realistic, is it? Be honest, it makes a fine parable, but if this was a true story...well, it just wouldn't work. That's why we enjoy movies and stories so much...they have an ending and the director can roll the credits at a point where everyone is happy. Romance stories show the courting and the coming together of lovers, but the credits roll after the wedding, before the honeymoon is over, before the marriage really begins.

Stories have a happy ending, but real life goes on and on. If the story of the prodigal son were real life, wouldn't end with the great feast and celebration. In all likelihood, the prodigal son wouldn't learn his lesson. He would have wonderful intentions, but then he would get drunk at the feast, wake up the next morning, turn on the XBox and continue to live off of his other brother's inheritance. And the elder brother would resent the father for being an "enabler" and tension and resentment will be the new family dynamic every Christmas and Easter.

The father's love demonstrated in this parable seems rather irresponsible. Scripture says in Proverbs, “**Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them**” (Proverbs 13:24). And yet this Father’s love shows no discipline for the younger son’s sin. Proverbs also says, “**Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it**” (Proverbs 3:27). Yet this Father’s love shows no appreciation of the older son’s obedience. There are no consequences for the wasteful son, and there is no special reward for the obedient son. T**he father in this story and he looks to be a doddering old fool, manipulated by a "half-cooked" apology to forget all that has passed.** And yet the Father is presented as the hero. What message does that send? "**Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow all is forgiven and forgotten?**" So much for anyone who would say that Jesus is just a great moral teacher. As C.S. Lewis once said, either Jesus is the son of God, or else a lunatic. There is no middle ground.

If you follow the parable as a parent, you're likely to do irreparable harm to your child. A parent's indiscriminate acceptance and approval regardless of wrongdoing, doesn't lead to morally responsible children as the book of Proverbs teaches. And so what if the prodigal son wouldn't have repented? What if he'd have died in his extravagant living? The father's reckless love in the story is vindicated only because it worked, and this stuff always works in the movies! And so was the father right in dividing his inheritance when the son asked? Well, you can't argue with results--the problem is that they're NOT results, it's just a story. In real life the son might have died in his sin. In real life we would be blaming the Father, and resounding with the older brother who'd say, **"I told you not to give him the money, dad. What were you thinking?!**"

All this to say, friends, that you can't read Jesus parables looking for practical lessons about how to live a successful life here and now. If my son Noah asks for his inheritance before I die I'm not going to give it to him. I don't think you would for your child either. Cause you wouldn't be helping them, you'd be buying their coffin.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's no moral lesson here, because Jesus' parables are not about the kingdom of the world, they are about the kingdom of heaven. Jesus tells many parables. Some are about scattering seeds, casting nets, managing money, tending to animals, and today…”parenting.” But they are parables, because they are speaking about something beyond the literal meaning. They are not telling you how to farm, or fish, or finance, or how to parent well. You can read Aesops fables to find moral lessons. But you read Jesus parables to find out how salvation happens. Jesus parables teach, not what things on earth are like, but what the kingdom of heaven is like. And it involves weakness before strength, poverty before riches, David before Goliath, Joseph before Pharaoh, mourning before celebration. It involves being lost before being found...humility before glory.

The story of the prodigal son tells us about God's plan of salvation. It points to the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus, and of his body, the church. Think about it: as the prodigal son left his father's inheritance, so too Christ took his father's inheritance, and came down to earth, *to our world*, to this land of sinners and prostitutes, recklessly giving up and away his whole life. He came in the form of God, but **not winning for himself any particular grandeur here. He eats with tax collectors and sinners, who to Jews, would be just about the equivalent of eating with pigs.** And yet, filthy and unclean, not because of his own sin, but because of his contact with it, he returns to his father in total repentance and obedience;

We know Jesus had nothing to repent of, but he comes carrying mankind in his person and repenting for mankind, on **your** behalf. This is the whole point of his baptism in the Jordan river to say "**Father have mercy on me, a sinner by imputation.**" Taking on our sins by associating with us sinners, he was no longer *worthy* to be called the Son of God. But He returns anyway to his father's house in utter submission and lowliness. He comes before his father in the form of a servant, and yet he is not rejected. His merciful, loving, "gracious to a fault" father rejoices and says "**Behold my son who was dead he is alive now!,**" And as a result you "adopted sons and daughters of the most High god"--you were lost and now are found in this new man brought back into God's house with all the inheritance restored to him, rings on his fingers and all that good stuff.

Like the prodigal son, Jesus spends his inheritance recklessly on sinners in a land of sin. He leaves the comfort and glory of being the Son of God in heaven to take on human flesh, become man, and dwell in the land of sinners, for the sake of sinners, so that he could become *the greatest sinner the world had ever known.* "**Jesus a sinner, what do you mean Pastor...that's blasphemy?"** Well before you pick up and polish you stones to take aim, read the last line of your Epistle lesson for today. "**For our sake he made Christ to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God**."

Jesus took on our sins, not in the sense that he committed them, but so that he could make it possible **for us sinners** to be received into the open and loving arms of his Father in heaven. Jesus took on our sin, and repented of them and died. But death could not hold him, and he raised from the dead, and has now returned to the right hand of his Father in heaven to prepare a place for you. **He was raised up by his father, given a new robe of glory, and his father bestowed from his right hand the ring of authority making him Lord of all.** And now he holds a feast and invites all of you to it--the feast in celebration and honour of his son who humbled himself carrying our sin to the cross and in whom we recognize his glory, his crucified and risen flesh hidden in **Holy Communion for you to eat and be united with his life and inherit his salvation.**

Remember that Jesus tells this parable because the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling that he was eating with sinners. And so the "moral of the story," is this, --There will be plenty of sinners feasting in heaven, because the Father who's love knows no bounds, has prepared a feast for the chief of sinners, His own Son. There will be guests from every nation whose sins were buried with Jesus in baptism, so that, as it says in Romans 6, "**just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the father, we too might walk in the newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall surely be united with him in a resurrection like his."**

Jesus "rolls the credits" of the parable after telling of the bitterness of the elder brother, **who never got his own party, and who believes he deserves special recognition for his lifelong and outwardly "faithful" service to his Father**. And so what will the older brother do? Jesus leaves us to ask, "where do I fit in? who do I identify with in the story?" Jesus can identify with the loving Father, for he is true God. Jesus does identify with the prodigal son who is every sinner. But Jesus cannot identify with the elder brother who, it seems, would cut off his nose to spite his face; who would cut off his father to spite his brother.

The elder brother would forsake his father's inheritance out of spite, and refuse to join the feast. **So it is that there are many moral people in the world, whose self-righteousness will actually cause them to reject the way of salvation that God has prepared for all people**. They will refuse Christ--who is the free and undeserved sacrifice of God on behalf of poor miserable sinners. And he is a reminder to the Pharisees and scribes, and you and me, that love keeps no record of wrongs or rights, but holds with grateful hands, the inheritance of the Father.

May we, with loving hearts receive in faith the mercy of our Lord, and count the greatest blessing of the Lord is the salvation we have received through Christ. The gift of God is is not that we are good upstanding moral people who are obedient, but that we are weak, poor and miserable sinners who are forgiven.