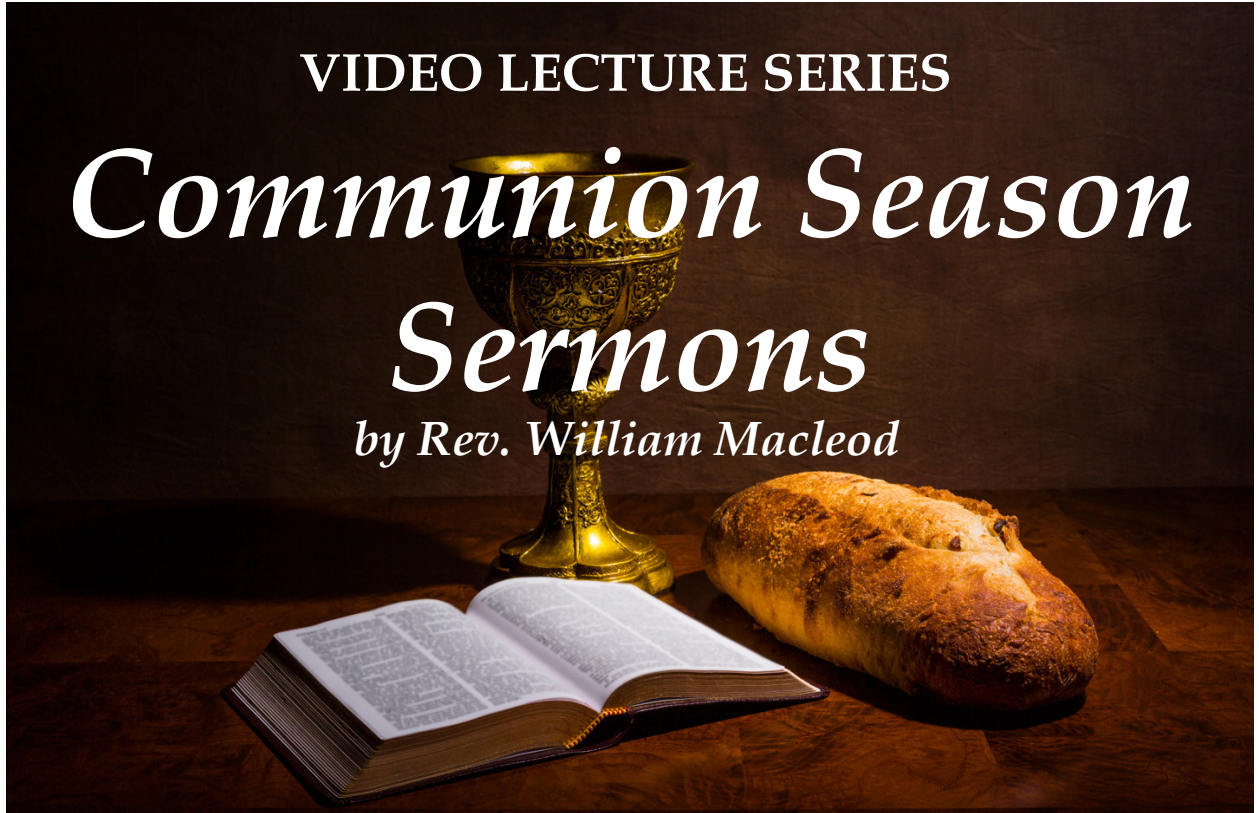


VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

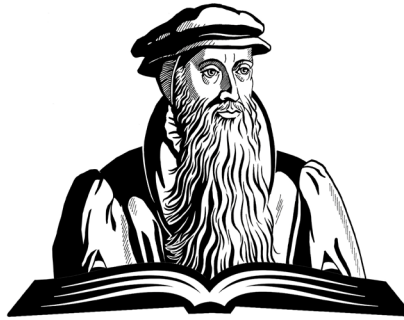
Communion Season
Sermons

by Rev. William Macleod



Sermon #6

Salvation for Pharisees
and Prodigals
Luke 15:29-30



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

John Knox Institute of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

© 2024 by John Knox Institute of Higher Education

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means for profit, except in brief quotations for the purposes of review, comment, or scholarship, without written permission from the publisher, John Knox Institute, P.O. Box 19398, Kalamazoo, MI 49019-19398, USA.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Authorized King James Version.

Visit our website: www.johnknoxinstitute.org

Rev. William Macleod recently retired, after serving as minister of the gospel for 45 years at Knightswood Free Church of Scotland (Continuing), in Glasgow, Scotland. In addition, he was for many years the editor of the denominational magazine, *The Free Church Witness*. He was also Professor of Systematic Theology and Principal of the Free Church (Continuing) Seminary, in Inverness, Scotland. He is married and has three adult children and six grandchildren.

www/freechurchcontinuing.org



Communion Season Sermons

*An Introduction and 7 Sermons
by Rev. William Macleod*

Introduction (Luke 22:14–20)

Sermon #1: Pardon My Sins (Psalm 51:9–10)

Sermon #2: Prepare Me for Thy Presence (Psalm 24:3–4)

Sermon #3: Examine Yourself (1 Corinthians 11:28)

Sermon #4: Mary's Great Love (Mark 14:3)

Sermon #5: The Awful Cup (Luke 22:42) / Communion Address

Sermon #6: Salvation for Pharisees and Prodigals

(Luke 15:29–30)

Sermon #7: Christ is Coming Again (Revelation 22:20–21)

Communion Season Sermons

by Rev. William Macleod

Sermon #6

Salvation for Pharisees and Prodigals (Luke 15:29–30)

Tonight, I would like to speak to you from the parable of the prodigal son. We'll read this chapter together first of all—Luke chapter 15:

“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

“And he said, A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and

dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”

Amen. May God bless to us the reading of his Word.

So I'd like today particularly to direct your attention to verses 29 and 30: “And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou has killed for him the fatted calf.”

I'm sure that you have all heard many sermons on the prodigal son. Today I would like us rather to concentrate on the elder brother. It's more likely that we will find the elder brother here in the church rather than the prodigal son. And actually, it's on the elder brother that Jesus puts the emphasis. The account of the elder brother comes last in the parable. It's the climax. Also, it's important for us to notice the context. Jesus tells this parable in response to the murmuring of the scribes and Pharisees: “Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” So, Jesus is telling this parable as a response to the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes.

Well, the first thing I'd like you to notice is the sad, lost condition of the elder brother. You might say, “Surely the elder brother was not lost. Does not the father say, in verse 31, All that I have is thine.” But what we have to remember is that this is a parable—an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. And not every detail in the story is to be interpreted. It's not God who says, “All that I have is thine,” it's just the father in the parable. The elder brother here shows no marks of grace. He hates his younger brother, and he's angry with his father, and he's very self-righteous. He feels he deserves better than he gets. And look at the context. The publicans and sinners drew near to Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes murmur, “This man receives sinners.” Yes he does, and isn't that wonderful? Isn't that brilliant, that Jesus receives sinners? God welcomes sinners to himself.

But the scribes and Pharisees think that they're not sinners. They deserve to be received—that's what they think. They're so self-righteous. Really, they're just hypocrites, and sadly, there's too many hypocrites in the church today. Are you a hypocrite? Do you think you deserve heaven? Or do you realize that, if God were to deal with you as you deserve, you would end up in hell. All of us are sinners. All of us break God's commandments. We've all made a mess of our lives. Or are you proud, and thinking, “I'm quite good. I'm better than others. I haven't done anything really bad. I'm maybe not the best person around, but lots of people worse than me. I try my best. What more can I do? Surely God couldn't possibly send me to hell.” Is that your attitude?—an attitude of self-righteousness.

There's an interesting parable told to us in Matthew chapter 20. A man who had a vineyard, and he goes out to the marketplace to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. He went out first thing in the morning at 6:00 a.m., and he agreed with laborers, day laborers who were there, he agreed that they would work all day for a penny a day, or a denarius. That was the usual rate for a laborer. Later

on in the day, at midday, he went out, and he found some other people idle in the marketplace. And he said to them, "Go and work in the vineyard, and I'll give you pay at the end of the day." He went out at 3:00 p.m., and similarly found others. And even at 5:00 p.m., he went out and there were people there in the marketplace. And he said, "Why are you spending all day idle? Go and work in my vineyard, and I'll give you what's appropriate." So then at 6:00 p.m., he said to his manager to go and to pay the workers, and to start with those who had just worked for one hour, and to give each one of them a penny. They had hardly done anything, and yet they were given what somebody would normally be given for working a whole day. So that was a huge amount. And then, those who had worked all day, they came, and they expected that they were going to get more. And when they were only given a penny, they began to complain. And they said, "That's not fair. We've worked all day, and we've just got a penny." But then he turned to them, and he said, "Did you not agree with me to work all day for a penny?" And, of course, they had. "Well," he said, "take what is yours, go your way. I can do what I like with my own." But you see, those who had worked all day, they were the scribes and the Pharisees. They thought they deserved more. But the wonderful thing about the gospel is that those who worked just one hour receive the same heaven. It's not a matter of our work or our merit. It's a matter of God's free grace; God's kindness; God's generosity.

We think of the thief who died beside Jesus on the cross. He had no time to do any work for Jesus, and yet Jesus said, "Today you shall be with me in paradise." The real Christian delights in big sinners being saved, but the hypocrite thinks that he can earn salvation and get to heaven because of his good works. So what about you? Are you like the scribes and the Pharisees, thinking you're earning your way to heaven; that you're quite good; that you're not bad enough to be condemned? Or are you a poor beggar like these men working in the vineyard, who just worked for an hour, and yet receive this great reward.

In the second place, I want you to notice how God loves to save prodigals. The Pharisees criticized Jesus because he receives sinners and eats with them. But that's a wonderful truth. He sits and eats with publicans and sinners. He came not to save the righteous, but to bring sinners to repentance. Those who are whole, who are healthy, don't need a doctor, a physician, but those who are sick. Jesus came to help the sick, not those who think they're okay. If you're a sinner, come to Christ! You're welcome! Whatever sins you've committed, you're welcome. You're like the lost sheep. The ninety-nine who didn't go astray, they're left behind, and the shepherd goes looking for the one lost sheep. And there's more joy over the lost sheep than there is over the ninety and nine who never went astray. There's great joy when he found the lost sheep. He laid it on his shoulders and came home rejoicing; came home and gathered his friends and neighbors together, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I found the sheep which was lost." Likewise, there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.

Think too of the woman, the woman who had the ten pieces of silver. She loses one piece. She hunts high and low. She sweeps the house. She looks everywhere till she finds the lost coin. And then, when she had found it, she is so happy. She calls her friends and neighbors in, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece that was lost." And so, in verse 10, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." What's the presence of the angels of God? That's God himself. The angels are in God's presence, and God is rejoicing before the angels in the sinner who repents. God loves to receive sinners. He welcomes them. This is a wonderful truth, the great truth of the gospel. You can't earn salvation. Christ has earned it for us. Christ came to save sinners.

And then, we read about the prodigal son, how he went astray; went so far astray; how he asked for the portion of goods that would fall to him; and couldn't wait till his father died; he wanted it now. "Give me my share," he says. And the father seems terribly lenient. He divides his resources between his two sons, and soon the young son takes his money, and away he goes. And he spends his time in a far country in pleasure, eating, drinking, making merry; dancing, parties, drugs, prostitutes, and so on. And he had lots of money, and because he had lots of money, he had lots of friends. And he's got no sense. He spends his money. But then, once his money is all spent, where are his friends? They soon disappeared. That's what they're like, these worldly friends. And then, to make things worse, a famine comes. There's a downturn in the economy. There's no work available. He's hungry. Eventually, somebody sends him into a field to feed pigs, but doesn't give him any pay. He's almost eating the swill that the pigs eat, he's so hungry. He's in such a low condition. For a Jew, the very worst job possible was looking after pigs. Pigs are unclean animals. But there he is, looking after the pigs, and not getting paid for it—hungry. And he comes to his senses. How did he come to his senses? Well, the Holy Spirit convicted him; made him aware of what a fool he was. And so he decides to return home. "In my father's house there's plenty. Hired servants there have food enough, and to spare. I'll go back to my father and confess, and say to him, I've been a fool. I've made a mess of my life. I'm no more worthy to be called your son. But make me as one of your hired servants. Allow me to work, and then I'll have food to eat.

So he sets off home, and the father sees him. He's obviously been looking out for him; sees him while he's still a long way off; recognizes him, and he runs to meet him. And he puts his arms around him, covered as he was with all the filth of the pigs. You can think of the stink that there was of him, in his rags, in his filth, in his mess, the father embraces him and kisses him. He says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, I'm not more worthy to be called thy son." But the father says to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger. Put shoes on his feet. Kill the fatted calf. We'll rejoice and be merry, for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Amazing grace—how wonderful God's unmerited favor. The father makes a feast for his son who has returned. He's got no merit, he deserves nothing, but he's given all.

And that's the way God is with you and me. We're all, by nature, prodigal sons. Do you see yourself as such? And how wonderful the welcome you will receive, if you come back to God. Whoever you are, whatever you've done, come to Christ. Seek him, call upon him, ask him into your heart and life. All will be forgiven, and you'll be made a new person, and you'll be blessed with all the blessings of this life, and the blessings of heaven to come. God loves to save prodigals.

And finally, *Sinners are welcome*. What a wonderful parable that we have here that pictures for us the real God, who's rich in mercy, who loves to save. There's joy in heaven over every sinner who repents. You can't earn salvation. You don't deserve it. We think of those workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20. They had just worked for one hour, and yet they get as much as others who had worked the whole day. The thief on the cross converted after a life of criminal activity, deserving to die on the cross, but being given a place in heaven.

Who gets to heaven? If you were to go out onto the street, and ask people who gets to heaven, they would say, "Good people get to heaven, and bad people go to hell." But that's not true. It's the other way around. Who gets to heaven?—bad people, bad people who don't deserve it. God hates hypocrisy, and there's nobody that's good. The self-righteous don't get to heaven. Those who think they're good don't get to heaven. When you have done everything, Jesus says, call yourself an unprofitable servant. When you have done your very best, you're unprofitable; you've only done

your duty (Luke 17:10).

But then, there's hope for the sinner. Harlots and publicans will enter heaven, and the children of the kingdom be shut out. I wonder, could that happen to you? Are you somebody who is born into a Christian home, grown up in a family, living in a Christian family, being good living all your life; knowing the Bible and attending church, and at the end of the day, ending up in hell? Remember, every one of us, in God's eyes, are great sinners. You're a sinner, and so am I. God is perfect. He demands perfection. And none of us are perfect. And therefore, we've got no hope in ourselves. In our own righteousness there's no hope. There's no hope for the elder brother. Unless you come to see your own sin, repent, and be converted, you cannot be saved. But whatever you've done in the past, nothing should exclude you. Whoever you are, whatever your past involved, come to Christ. You are welcome. "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22). No matter where you live, no matter who you are, no matter what you've done, look to Christ! Call upon him. Pray to him, and you will be saved. We have a wonderful Savior.

Let's pray.

O Lord our God, we thank thee that the Lord Jesus is stretching out his arms to us. All day long, he says, I have stretched out mine arms to a disobedient and gainsaying people, to rebellious people, to those who refuse me and reject me. We thank thee, O Lord, that thou dost welcome sinners to thyself. And we pray that we would come, not in our own goodness or our own righteousness, not thinking we deserve this or that, but that we would come as poor and needy sinners before thee, crying for mercy, and putting our trust in the blood of Jesus. Bless us then, O Lord, each one, and forgive us for all our sins, and help us to put our trust in Christ as our Savior, in whose name we pray, amen.