**Luke 15:25-32**

**THE PRODIGAL BROTHER**

**Intro**: Today, we again turn our attention to the most famous of our Lord’s parables. This extended parable in Luke 15 is intended to teach the truth that God loves sinners. He loves the lost enough to go after them in their lost condition, as evidenced by all three illustrations in this chapter. He loves the self-righteous sinner enough to tell them about their condition, which is why He told this parable to begin with.

Very often, when this chapter is preached, you hear about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son, but it is a rare day when you hear anything about the elder brother.

Why is that? I think we avoid this story because our focus is on the emotional reunion between the father and the prodigal. I also think we avoid this section because it hits a little too close to home! There is at least a little, and maybe a lot, of the elder brother in nearly each of us.

III. Some preachers were discussing the Bible one day when the subject of the elder brother and his identity came up. They were trying to figure out who he was.

One older preacher spoke up and said, “I know who he is. In fact, I saw him just today.”

The other ministers, eager to hear his response asked, “Who is he?”
The wise old preacher said simply, “He is me!”

As the Lord Jesus reaches the end of this parable, He is still talking about lost things. He is still dealing with the attitude of the Scribes and Pharisees toward lost sinners, v. 1-2. The elder brother in this text pictures a person who is involved in the things of God, but who has no real relationship with God. He is in the father’s house, but he is lost. He is in the “far country” in his heart!

**Verse 11** reminds us that this father had “two sons,” and both were lost.

- The younger son was lost in “the far country.”
- The elder brother was lost in the father’s house.
- The younger son was a lost hedonist; he lived for pleasure.
- The elder brother was a lost moralist; he lived to maintain appearances.

There are two ways you can be lost.

- One way is to break the rules and do as you please. This is how the younger brother lived, and he was lost.
- The other way, is to keep all the rules and to be good. This is how the elder brother lived, and he was lost too.

We don’t get this because we equate being good with being saved. But, if you are only being good to earn favor with God, you are lost. If you keep the rules so that God will have to hear your prayers and bless you, you have missed the point. The Gospel is not be good and you will be saved; the Gospel is be saved, and you will be good.
This message is designed to speak to two classes of people.
• The primary message is to those who are lost in sin and need to be saved. You might be religious, you might be a church member, you might be a good, moral person, but you have never been saved. God has a word for you today.
• This message also has a word for people who are saved, but who have the same spirit an attitude as the elder brother.
  - It speaks to people who are upset when God blesses His people.
  - It speaks to people who do not like it when the prodigal sons come home.
  - It speaks to people who refuse to rejoice over what God is doing because it isn’t being done their way.
  - It speaks to people who are like the elder brother.

We are going to talk about The Prodigal Brother today. It may just be that the Lord will pinpoint a problem area in your life. If He does, please obey His voice and deal with whatever issues He exposes.

For the next while, let’s listen to what the Lord has to say in these verses about The Prodigal Brother. There are some lessons here that we do not need to miss.

I. V. 25a HIS RESPECTABILITY
A. He Was A Leader - He is the elder brother. As such, he is entitled to two-thirds of His father’s possessions, Deut. 21:17. Since his younger brother has already received his part of the inheritance, v. 12, everything belongs to this brother. When his father dies, not only will he receive his father’s possessions, he will also become the legal and religious head of the family.
Much has been given to this young man already and more is on the way. He has been blessed indeed!

B. **He Was A Laborer** - When we first meet this man, he is “*in the fields*”. He is busy doing his father’s business. While his younger brother has been off in the far country living it up, this young man has stayed home and worked. He has been working hard. It seems that all is well in this family, and that there is good fellowship between the father and this older boy.

The elder brother is a picture of the religious elite. They were also in a place of privilege. They had God’s Law and it appeared, outwardly at least, that they were walking in the Law! They looked good to others, but there was a real problem in their hearts! The problem was hidden from human view, but God could see it. They were religious, but they were lost!

The same thing could be true of some here! You are a moral person. You come to church. You don’t cuss, drink, steal or cheat. You don’t smoke, chew, or kiss girls who do. You have been baptized and belong to the church. By all appearances, you are as good, or better, than anyone around you. The Lord knows your true condition. You can fool others, but you can’t fool Him, **1 Sam. 16:7**.

- You can be good, moral and active in church and still be lost. Jesus said so in **Matt. 7:21-23**.
- You might think you are right with God, but you can’t trust what you “*feel in your heart*”. The heart is wicked and deceitful, only God truly knows our hearts, **Jer. 17:9-10**!
I am not trying to make anyone doubt their salvation.
• I am simply saying that religion does not equal salvation.
• Church membership does not equal conversion.
• Being close to the things of God does not equal being saved by the grace of God.

Being in a church does not make you a Christian anymore than sleeping in a garage makes you a car, neither does climbing a tree make you a squirrel. You must not depend on who you are or what you have done for your salvation. You must be born again, John 3:3, 7. Salvation is by grace through faith, Eph. 2:8-9. Are you saved?

I. His Respectability

II. V. 25b-30  HIS RESENTMENT
Heading home after a hard day in the fields, this brother hears the sounds of celebrating as he nears the house. He is confused, as far as he knows, there is no reason for celebration at the father’s house. He’s lived there all his life and he has never seen a reason for celebration.

He calls a servant, the text suggests it was a young boy, and asks the meaning of all the noise. The servant tells him of his lost brother’s return and about the father killing the fatted calf and throwing a party. When he hears this, he becomes “angry.” The word means “to become red-faced.” It speaks of a person clenching their fists, and becoming red with anger. In his actions
here, his resentment toward the father and His brother can be clearly seen.

As I consider this young man, I see some characteristics that trouble me.

- He did not love his younger brother.
  - As the older brother, it was his responsibility to go after his missing sibling. He didn’t go. The text suggests that he didn’t even show up to say goodbye. His actions indicate that he didn’t care what happened to his younger boy.
  - He didn’t care that his younger brother had come home. This man had already written off his younger brother and didn’t care what happened to him.

- He did not love the father either.
  - He was disrespectful to the father.
  - He was resentful of the father’s open love for the younger son.
  - He was self-serving, hateful and condescending.
  - He might have been living at home and laboring for the father, but he did not love the old man.

A. **His Resentment Is Seen In His Motives** - When this brother hears why there is a celebration, he is angry and refuses to go in. His father comes out and gently pleads with him to come in. His reply to his father is very telling of this boy’s heart. In **verse 29**, he reminds the father of his faithful service and complains that he has never been given a feast for what he has done. The bottom line here is this:
  1. He did not care that his lost brother had come home.
  2. He did not care about that which pleased the father.
The elder brother would have known that the day of the prodigal’s return was the greatest day in his father’s life.
- The father has “killed the fatted calf”, an enormously expensive extravagance in a culture where even having meat at meals was considered a delicacy.
- The older son realized his father was ecstatic with joy. Yet he refused to go into the biggest feast his father has ever put on. This was a remarkable, deliberate act of disrespect. It was his way of saying, “I won’t be part of this family nor respect your headship of it.”
- And the father had to “go out” to plead with him. Just as he went out to bring his alienated younger son into the family, now he had to do the same for the older brother. ¹

3. He did not even care about the father. Evidently, he did what he did for what he could get out of it.
4. He saw his service to the father as “slavery,” v. 29. The word “serve” translates the word “doulos”, it always refers to a “slave.” He is saying, “All these years I have been in bondage to you!” He didn’t serve his father out of love for the father, but out of a desire to help himself.

This same attitude can be seen in the church.
• Some won’t rejoice when sinners are saved, because they feel threatened. Ill. Jonah - Jonah 4.
• They cannot get excited when a church grows, because they see their hold on power slipping away.
• They do not care about God’s will being done in the church; if it runs counter to their personal agenda.
• They want the all accolades, all the pats on the backs and all the glory.
• Their service in the church is not about God, it is about them!
• Some people go through the motions of serving the Lord for what they think they will gain from it.

When you see this kind of attitude on display, either you have a lost person masquerading as a saved person, or you have someone who is out of God’s will!

B. **His Resentment Is Seen In His Mentality** - When you listen to this boy talk to the father, you quickly realize that he is proud, disrespectful, arrogant, and angry. There is obviously something wrong with his attitude about this situation. He should be overjoyed! His brother has returned safely from the far country. He should be rejoicing that the father has received a lost son home again. All he can do is whine, pout and complain.

Do you want to know what his real problem is? He tells us in **verse 30**. Look at what he says, who told him this boy had spent his money on prostitutes? He hasn’t talked to the father or to his brother.

Do you know what’s wrong with him? He’s jealous! He may be at home in body, but he is in the far country in his heart! He is as far away from the father as was the other son when he went away. All he really wants to do is live it up like his brother! He won’t go and do it, because his pride won’t let him. So he gets mad that one who did the very things he wants to do in his heart has been received by the father.
Ill. This is what was wrong with the Pharisees. They kept the letter of the Law outwardly, but in their hearts, they lusted, they hated, and they longed for sin!

• You don’t have to be a drunk to be out of God’s will!
• You don’t have to be an adulterer to be in the far country spiritually.
• You can serve your church, sing in the choir, preach the Word, or anything else you want to name and still be out of God’s will!
• You may look as good as anyone today, but you can have a heart that is filled with lust, evil thoughts, desires for sin, etc.

Do you see it? You can pretend to be anything you wish outwardly, but it is the condition of the heart that matters, **Matt. 15:18-19**.

When you get saved, the Lord gives you a new heart, **Eze. 36:26**. That gives you the ability to live a new life. It is even possible for people with new hearts to full of sin and evil. What is the solution? **1 John 1:9**!

Another problem this man had was due to the father’s use of his wealth. In **verse 12** we are told that the father, “*divided to them his living.*” Everything the father has already belongs to the elder brother, **v. 31**. It will all fall into his hands when the father dies. He is mad because the father dared use wealth that was to come to him to throw a feast for this despised brother. This older brother has real problems!
C. **His Resentment Is Seen In His Methods** - The elder brother did two things here that indicate that he as resentful toward the father, as much as toward his younger brother.

- First, it was a sign of disrespect to fail to greet ones father with a proper title. Even the younger brother did this, v. 12.
- Second, it was also disrespectful for a young man to argue with his father. This boy did just that in front of the servants and the guests. He brought as much, or maybe more, disgrace upon the father as the other son, because he did what he did in public.

Notice how this young man handled his anger. He attacked, he criticized and he blamed! This lets you know that his heart is not right! Why? The outward attitudes and actions are a mirror into the heart. Listen to what Paul says about this is **Gal. 5:19-23; Matt. 12:35**.

What does your heart say about you? You watch people who can only attack others, criticize and place blame on everyone but themselves. That kind of person has real spiritual issues!

I told you, this hits close to home!

I. **His Respectability**
II. **His Resentment**
III. V. 28, 31-32  **HIS REACTION**

A.  **He Refused The Father’s Plea** - The father went out and “entreated” this boy to come in to the feast. The word “entreat” means “to come alongside of another to offer aid and comfort, to beg, to console, to comfort, to encourage.” It is the same word that is translated “Comforter” in **John 16:13** and is one of the names of the Holy Spirit. This father loved him, and came outside to encourage this man to come to the feast, to celebrate the return of his lost brother.

Notice that this son won’t even call him “father”, but the father calls him “son”. This father went to this boy in the right spirit, but he was rejected!

There are times when the Lord speaks to us as well. If we are saved, He will speak to us to encourage us, or to confront the sin that is in our lives. If we are saved, He speaks to us and calls us to repent of our sins, to come to Jesus, and to be saved. Is He speaking to you today? If He is, please do not refuse His voice. Do what He is pleading with you to do.

B.  **He Refused The Father’s Promises** - The father praised him for his efforts, and reminded him that everything was already his! In effect, this father was saying, “*I value you and our relationship far more than I value your works.*” This boy could have enjoyed fellowship with the father anytime he wanted, but apparently, he was too wrapped up in his own legalism and narrow-mindedness to realize it. This boy wanted what the father had, but he did not want the father, just like his younger brother, **v. 12**.
Even though he didn’t want the father, he did not want anyone else to have the father either. What a tragedy!

The same thing is true in many lives today! People want the church. They want to feel better about themselves. They want a fire insurance policy. They want the get out of hell free card. But, they don’t really want an intimate relationship with the Father. Often, they resent those who do want that closeness. I just want to remind you that you are as close to the Lord as you want to be! You have as much fellowship with Him as you want to have. You can have more, if you want it. Do you?

C. **He Refused The Father’s Passion** - The father tells this boy that is was “meet” that they should have this celebration. The word “meet” means “necessary”. To the father, the return of the lost son was a cause for celebration. The Father was passionate about the younger son’s return. A lost one had been found. One considered dead was now alive again. And, perhaps most importantly, a father’s love and faith had been vindicated and the family name restored.

There was much cause for rejoicing. The father wants this boy to learn the truth that everything isn’t about him and about him getting his own way. There are bigger issues at stake and they should take priority!

This is how things are in the work of God as well. Nothing is more important than the glory of God. That is why God does all He does. He seeks to glorify His name in the universe, and those
who love Him have that as their goal as well. Instead of getting upset when God doesn’t do things our way, we should learn to thank Him for what He is doing! Instead of pouting, this boy could have been partying! And, so could we!

Look at this chapter. **Everyone is happy but the elder brother.** The shepherd is happy. His friends are happy. The woman is happy. Her friends are happy. The father is happy. The lost son is happy. The servants are happy. The residents of Heaven are happy. The only person who is miserable here is the elder brother.

He is miserable because he refuses to be happy. The feast is there, all he has to do is go in and enjoy himself! Instead, he is standing out there pouting, because he is not the center of attention, and because he didn’t get his way! What a shame!

**Conc:** Have you ever noticed that this is an open-ended story? Did the elder brother ever come into the feast? We don’t know! I think Jesus left it this way for a reason. And here is that reason: *Every individual must write his or her own ending to this story!*

For Israel, the story ended badly. The Lord Jesus Christ presented Himself to the nation as their long awaited Messiah. He came to them as the fulfillment of all the ancient prophecies. They knew Who He claimed to be, but they refused to receive Him as their Messiah, as their Lord, or as their Savior.

In this story, the elder brother represents the religious leaders of Israel. They refused to come to the feast, and in the end, they
killed the father. They murdered Him because they would not have Him rule over them. When Israel crucified their King, they murdered the father and wrote their own ending to the story.

How will this story end for you?
• If you are lost today, you need to come to Jesus Christ for salvation today.
• If you are saved, but not where you need to be, you should get things right today. There is a party going on, and you are invited. Don’t stay outside listening to be celebration. Come in and be a part of it.

If the Lord has spoken to your heart about salvation or about your personal walk with Him, please come today while He is calling. The whole point of this extended parable has been to show the importance of the human soul to God and to point lost people to a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

He loves you. Won’t you come?

1 Adapted from: http://timothykeller.com/images/uploads/pdf/Sermon_Outline_4_The_Elder_Brother.pdf