

The Parables of Jesus #31
The Parable of the Lost Son - 3
Lessons from the Older Son
(Lk. 15:25-32)
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INTRODUCTION

A. Remember the purpose of the whole parable (15:11-32)

1. It was one of three Jesus told in answer to criticism by the scribes and Pharisees
2. The story is an excellent summary of the gospel message

B. Remember, too, this is a kind of mini-series within our parable series

1. We last looked at the younger son and learned from his example how things go wrong and how they can be repaired
2. There is more to learn from this parable

C. Tonight we look at some lessons we can learn from the older son

1. He is often the forgotten or neglected character in the story
2. We might think he is unimportant to the story, but in reality he is definitely a main character
3. This older son clearly represents the scribes and Pharisees who had criticized Jesus for associating with sinners and tax collectors

D. The problems of the older son are frequently the problems we find among the very religious

1. As such, they are problems the church often doesn't want to admit
2. They are extremely difficult problems to deal with

I. THE OLDER SON'S MISUNDERSTANDINGS (Lk 15:25-27)

A. This son should have understood his father

1. By his own claim, he had not demanded his inheritance like his brother
2. He had never left home to live a wasteful life
3. He had stayed with his father all the years of his life
4. He was involved in his father's daily affairs and business
5. Unlike his brother, he would doubtlessly have claimed a close, positive relationship with his father

B. The fact is, however, he did not understand his father at all

1. Upon approaching the house, he heard sounds of music and dancing
2. He called a servant and inquired about what was happening
3. The very fact that there was a celebration happening caused him to question and respond negatively
4. Did he not trust his father to have a good reason to celebrate?
5. Did he not know that his father looked constantly for the return of his brother?

C. Problems created by the older brother's misunderstandings

1. He did not understand the heart of his father
2. He thought his physical nearness was the important part of his relationship with his father
3. He assumed his acceptance by his father was based on his own good behavior
4. Consider the following passages as evidence that this problem exists
 - a. 2 Tim 3:5
having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (NKJ)
 - b. Matt 23:23
Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (NKJ)

II. THE OLDER SON'S IMPROPER RESPONSE (Lk 15:28)

A. Instead of joining the celebration, the older son became angry

1. The father rejoiced at his younger son's return, but the older son was angered
2. The father pleaded with him but the older son sulked

B. These events fell outside the older son's comprehension

1. Throw a party for my brother who took his inheritance and left?
2. Celebrate because my brother who didn't care anything about us had decided to return?
3. You're going to honor my brother in spite of all that he's done to shame us and tarnish the family name?

C. This is exactly how many people think about others who have wandered away from God

1. We treat them with disdain
2. It is beyond understanding how God could or would love them
3. We don't want to have anything to do with them

D. Note the following passages, for they relate to this problem

1. Jonah 4:1-3

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. So he prayed to the LORD, and said, ""Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" (NKJ)

2. Matt 23:13

But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. (NKJ)

III. THE OLDER SON'S SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS (Lk 11:29)

A. The older son made three claims that pointed to himself

1. Lo, these many years I have been serving you;
 - a. he sets up the contrast and distinction between himself and his younger brother
 - b. it is true that the self-righteous person does a lot in service to God, just as it was true this son served his father
 - c. the problem is that the service is not out of love and desire to please the master as it is to achieve a reputation for self
2. I never transgressed your commandment at any time;
 - a. this is the claim of the moral man who sees himself as innocent when compared to others
 - b. he may admit to some slight mistake or sin, but certainly he is not in the same condition as the younger son and his prodigal living
 - c. it is a claim that looks not to God for help, but to self as deserving of God's blessings
3. you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. (NKJ)
 - a. in other words, "Look at how I've sacrificed"
 - b. in other words, "You've slighted me"
 - c. in other words, "This celebration doesn't make any sense because I'm worth it, but others aren't"

B. Note the following passages

1. Matt 7:21-23

Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!" (NKJ)
2. Matt 23:25-28

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also

outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (NKJ)

IV. THE OLDER SON'S LACK OF COMPASSION (Lk 15:30)

A. It is obvious that the father and the older son identify the younger differently

1. The father: "this (younger) son of mine"
2. The older son: "this son of yours who has devoured your livelihood with harlots"

B. This is a frequent problem among "religious" people

1. They focus on problems, faults and sins
2. God is focusing on humility, repentance and forgiveness

C. This is at the heart of the older son's behavior, and that of the scribes and Pharisees

1. How could the father in the story be so glad that the younger son returned home?
2. Why was his return a cause for celebration rather than a "calling on the carpet?"

D. Consider the following verses that relate to this problem

1. Ps 51:16-17
For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; you do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart-- these, O God, You will not despise. (NKJ)
2. Hosea 6:6
For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. (NKJ)
3. Matt 9:13
But go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (NKJ)

CONCLUSION

A. The words of the father to the older son are very instructive

1. Luke 15:31-32

And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found. (NKJ)

2. Here is what the older son should have known

- a. the father knew he was with him
- b. all that the father had was his
- c. but it was also right to celebrate at the younger son's return
- d. it's as if he was dead but is now alive again
- e. he was lost and is found

B. The tragedy is that while he remained so close to his father, he had missed knowing his father's heart

1. This is so true for many religious people
2. They are so busy "being and doing" good that they forget or never see what the father is all about

C. What do you think God thinks about sinners and ungodly people

1. How do you think they ought to be received?
2. Do you think God is waiting anxiously for them to return to Him?
3. Do you think heaven celebrates when one of them repents?
4. Unless you are waiting to join the celebration, perhaps you have more of the older brother in you than you need

D. Invitation