

The Prodigal Son – Luke 15:11-32

Who is the prodigal son? (part 2)

The anger of the elder son reveals the state of his heart. It was venomous! He was not involved in the preparation or decision making as the father was still in charge. As he drew near his home, he heard the music and the dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what the meaning of the music and dancing was. The reply was, *“Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.”* The news of his younger brother’s return did not go well with the elder brother! The fatted calf slaughtered to welcome him home was the straw that broke the elder brother’s back! The fact that the father had received him back, safe and sound, shocked him to the depths of his soul and filled his heart with hatred. In his angry mind and heart, he realized that his younger brother would have a “second” share of father’s inheritance, now that father had received him back with a great feast. The knowledge that father had forgiven his rebellious younger brother, was most repugnant to elder brother’s greedy and selfish heart!

Father’s inheritance was his to possess since younger brother had already taken his share. He refused to go into his own home because of his anger! The word for “anger” refers to “wrath stemming from a violent passion within his soul.” He refused to enter and rejoice with the entire household. The father had to come out to intreat him. The tense for “intreat” is one of continuous urging. The father kept on beseeching him to go in and rejoice because younger brother had returned home. Instead, he answered his father, saying, *“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: **30** But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.”*

His own words condemned him. They exposed the kind of heart he had. Note the following observations concerning the elder son –

- **These many years he served** – the word for serve is “slave.” Instead of serving as a son, he served his own father as a slave in his own home! He was not even a *diakonos* (deacon) which emphasized his service. He deliberately used the word for slave to highlight his status at home!
- **Did not transgress at any time** – this was an exaggeration, for an external form of obedience was what he displayed all these years he was home; was he not transgressing by not entering the house to rejoice with father now that younger brother had returned home?
- **Never gavest him a kid** – The bitterness in his heart is evident through these words of complaint. He claimed that he had stayed home and obeyed father’s every commandment, and not even a baby goat was given in his honour! He served as a slave for reward rather than father’s love and approval;

- **This thy son [NOTE - not my brother] who returned after devouring all for him, father gave a fatted calf** – Father’s younger son had lived a life of sin and debauchery and had wasted everything father had given to him, and now that he’s back [NOTE--elder son refused to say he had returned home, for that would mean father’s home was also his home], a fatted calf was slaughtered for him. How he hated his younger brother for returning home to father! Perhaps he hated his father more for welcoming him back when he had wasted everything!

The father’s reply was poignant and yet very firm. He called him “son” and said that he has always been with him. All that father has is his. He should be glad in his heart that younger brother was dead and is alive again; he was lost but now has been found!

The Application of the Parable – What was lost or wasted by the younger son did not concern the father at all. He was not thinking of the inheritance that younger son had wasted. He did not make an issue of the sins which his younger son had committed against him. What was in father’s heart was the return of his younger son. He was dead and now he is alive. He was dead in sin and he is now alive in Christ. He was lost in the depths of sin and wallowing in sin but he has been found and has returned. His son had repented of his sins. He has returned home! It was joy unspeakable to have his son back. Every sinner’s life comes from God. When he accepts Christ as his Lord and Saviour, his life returns to God like the life of the prodigal son. Whatever sins were committed in the past the Father forgives through Christ Jesus. The sinner’s sins have been washed by the blood of Jesus Christ!

The elder son was mean-spirited. He had a legalistic mind and heart. His reaction to his younger brother’s return revealed his wicked heart. There was no love, only anger. He had hoped his younger brother would remain dead and buried never to return! He was concerned, not for the glory of father, but for his personal selfish gain. This consumed him. His legalistic attitude filled his being with bitterness and hatred when younger brother returned home.

The elder brother represents the Pharisees and scribes who had been in charge of the Levitical system of worship (which came from the LORD) all their existence. When sinners come to Christ they are saved. They now have a part in the heavenly inheritance. The Pharisees and scribes were not jealous for God’s glory, they were self-centred and were angry that sinners were entering God’s kingdom. They did not care for the sinners’ salvation and return to God. Like the elder son these Pharisees continue to condemn the sinners for past sins. They did not want the sinners to repent of their sins. To them, these sinners were wicked and committed sins deserving of death and destruction, not forgiveness! They must not be allowed to come home!

Who was the real prodigal son?