

The Parable of the Elder Son

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Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived upon earth. He taught his disciples by many different parables, and often made the application for them. The fifteenth chapter of Luke contains three well-known parables: the parable of the lost sheep - verses 3-7; the parable of the lost coin - verses 8-10; and the parable of the lost son - verses 11-24. The point of these parables is the rejoicing over finding that which was lost and found. Those things that were lost were of such value that when they were found there was great rejoicing.

Turn now to Luke 15:25-32 and read of the **elder son** who would not rejoice at the restoration of his brother. He was also alienated from his father.

The account of the elder son is a part of the parable of the prodigal son who took his inheritance and went into a foreign country where he wasted it in riotous and evil living. When all of his money was gone, and he found himself in great need, he "came to himself" and resolved to return to his father and seek forgiveness. He repented of his sins and returned home. His father saw him coming and ran to meet him and welcome him home. He rejoiced because "this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

Now the elder son was in the field. As he came to the house and saw the celebrating because of the return of the younger son, he called a servant to find out why his father had made a feast. When he learned of the return of his younger brother, he was angry and would not go into the house. No doubt this elder son represented the scribes and Pharisees in Jesus' lesson. They were angry at Jesus for receiving sinners who repented. They were envious of all who did not stand with them in their attitude toward Jesus.

There are five things about the elder son to which I want to call attention:

1. **He was angry.** Verse 28: "And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him." He was angry because his lost brother was found and had been restored to his father. Anger expresses resentment. It also indicates selfishness in most cases. The elder son had a bad attitude toward both his father and his brother: he did not want his brother to receive the blessings of his father, and he did want his father to rejoice at the return of his brother. He was envious of his brother, and therefore was angry because he was received home with joy.

2. **He was self-righteous.** Verse 29: "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 . . . "

The younger son who repented said: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (verse 21). The elder son said: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment . . . " (verse 29).

A self-righteous person will not obey the righteousness of God. They go about to establish their own

righteousness. Romans 10:3 says: "For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." The elder son did not consider himself a sinner, and he did not seek any favor from his father.

3. **He was ungrateful.** He said to his father: "...and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" (verse 29). But his father told him: "...Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine." (verse 31). His father said he had anything the father had, but he was so ungrateful that he did not consider himself to have anything. Ingratitude is a terrible sin. It hardens the heart to the manifold gifts of God and the blessings available every hour of the day and night to his saints. We must ". . . let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful" (Col. 3:15).

4. **He hated his brother.** He was envious of his brother and did not want him to receive anything from the father. Verse 30 says: "But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

The New Testament teaches that we cannot hate our brother and be saved. 1 John 3:15: "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him." 1 John 4:20 says: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" We must love our brother if we want to be saved.

5. **He was not happy.** He would not rejoice because his brother had quit his sinning and returned to his father. His father said unto him: "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" (Luke 15:32).

Those who have the attitude of the elder son must look at themselves and repent as the younger son did, if they want to be received and be blessed of the Father in heaven.