

# The Prodigal Son - Part 3: The Older Son

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[ 0 : 00 ] God's Word, which I pray is well read and treasured in your hearts, and turn to Luke's first account, chapter 15. This is the Gospel of Luke, chapter 15.

In case you've not been with us for the past two weeks, we've been considering together what is most often referred to as the parable of the prodigal son. However, many people will miss the driving point of the story if we think that it is all about the younger of these two brothers.

In Luke, chapter 15, Jesus masterfully tells a story in order to expose the sinfulness of those who would grumble that this man receives sinners and eats with them.

So, the story is driving to a point which is made in the response of the older brother. All the same, that does not mean that we shouldn't appreciate the other characters of the story and what we can learn of the folly of reckless living or of the licentious love of God.

Two weeks ago, we considered the younger son and his desire to be independent from his father and to have the possessions that his father would give to him so that he could spend it on himself.

[ 1 : 24 ] We observed the younger son being brought to such a desperate state that he comes to his senses and decides to return to his father to live as a servant. Last week, we considered the great compassion of the father as he shames himself in order to receive his son back and restore him fully to his status as a son with all of the honor and authority that accompanies it.

And then we saw the celebration of his restoration that follows. Now, as Jesus is about to drive home his point, recall for us that this story is very endearing.

We can play the images out in our minds. We love to consider a wayward son returning home and being embraced by his father. But the Pharisees and the scribes would have been astonished that the father would have treated such a disrespectful son in this manner.

The younger son, in asking for his inheritance, was wishing the father dead. And the Pharisees and the scribes could not fathom a father that would love his son in this way.

At this point, they would have been furious. You see, the Pharisees and the scribes are represented by the older brother in the story.

[ 2 : 51 ] They see Jesus with tax collectors and sinners drawing near to him. And they say, as self-righteous religious elites, that they want to preserve their status as such.

They would never want the reputations of those drawing near to Jesus to solely their reputations. And they, as we will see, want nothing to do with a God that would love the younger brothers of this world.

So let's read Luke chapter 15 in its entirety. Our focus for this morning is going to be on verses 25 through 32.

Before I read, beloved, let me remind you that this is God's word to us. It was written for his glory and for our good. And as such, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

So beginning in verse 1. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them.

[ 4 : 02 ] So he told them this parable. What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if

she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. Just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

And he said, There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me. And he divided his property between them.

[ 5 : 10 ] Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country. And there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him.

[ 6 : 18 ] And put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, Your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you.

And I never disobeyed your command. Yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.

[ 7 : 17 ] And he said to him, Son, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad. For this your brother was dead and is alive.

He was lost and is found. Now the outline for our study this morning will juxtapose the failing love of the oldest son with the unfailing love of the father in the following outline.

Number one, the failing love of the oldest son for his father. Number two, the failing love of the oldest son for his younger brother.

And number three, the unfailing love of the father for his oldest son. Number one, the failing love of the oldest son for his father.

I hope you're not getting those mixed up. The failing love of the oldest son for his father. And we see this mostly in verses 28 and 29. You see that he was angry at this report that his younger brother had returned and there was great rejoicing and the fattened calf had been killed and he refused to go inside to the party.

[ 8 : 44 ] The oldest son was so furious. And he is furious with the father. He stands outside of the celebration fuming.

Why? Because his perceived rights have been trampled upon. Because he didn't run about seeking his pleasure like his younger brother, but stayed and shouldered more than his fair share of the work on his father's estate.

He's mad. He wants justice, not mercy. He wants his younger brother to get what is coming to him. He wants him punished, not celebrated.

And so he begins grumbling, just as the Pharisees and scribes. He says, look, these many years I have served you and I never disobeyed your command.

Now, is it true that the oldest son was never disobedient? Of course not. This is a parable, to be clear.

[ 9 : 49 ] But there's no one who ever is perfectly obedient. This is an impossibility, right? But his perception is that he has been perfectly obedient. He thinks so.

He is self-righteous. He believes that he has been perfectly good, or at least good enough to earn his father's favor.

And this was the state of the Pharisees and the scribes. In Luke chapter 5, verses 30 through 32, Luke records this.

It should sound familiar. And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?

And Jesus answered them, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

[ 10 : 51 ] Is Jesus suggesting in Luke chapter 15 and in Luke chapter 5, that the Pharisees and scribes are well? Absolutely not.

He is addressing their perception of themselves. He is saying, You do not see that you are sick, so therefore you do not see your need of a physician.

Elsewhere, Matthew chapter 23. This is verses 27 and 28. Jesus says, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!

For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. You put on a very good show.

[ 11 : 53 ] The Pharisees and scribes should have seen themselves in the older brother and had been broken by their self-righteous indignation toward the younger sons who were gathering around Jesus.

They needed to lay aside their self-righteousness and see that they also hate the Father. They should have humbled themselves and turned to the one who was telling them this story.

Jesus says in Matthew chapter 5 verse 3, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are those who recognize they have nothing by which to buy their place in the kingdom of God, that they cannot earn their salvation.

Mankind's issue before God has never been one of outward activity, but rather one of inward affection. God wants our affections to be set on Him, which to be clear yields obedience, but that obedience is ultimately for God.

[ 13 : 07 ] It is aimed at Him to please Him and to glorify Him because we love Him. The oldest son is not obedient in order to please his father, but he's rather obedient to get what he can from Him.

Look what he goes on to say, right? He says essentially, I have been so perfectly obedient, and then, yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.

He is angry at the father's celebration over the return of his younger brother, not because, so much because of the younger brother being celebrated, but because he has not been celebrated.

Because he's not been given something material, and look who he wants to celebrate with. A young goat so that he might celebrate with his friends.

He wants nothing to do with the father, just like the younger son wanted nothing to do with the father. They both want, in the case of the younger brother at this point in our story, wanted, they both want or wanted the father dead.

[ 14 : 28 ] The older brother failed to love the father. Earlier in Luke 15, the younger brother says to the father, Father, give me the share of the property that is coming to me.

What he's saying is, would you just go ahead and die? I want what is mine. And then very curiously, verse 12, the last part of it, Luke records for us that Jesus says, and the father, he divided his property between them.

So he grants the wish. But does he grant it just to the younger son? He grants it to both of them. Both to the younger and to the older. And Jesus at this point, again, this is a parable.

He's telling the story. We don't have the full detail of a real event here. He's just telling a story. But because he's driving at the heart of the scribes and the Pharisees, note that he doesn't say here, and the older brother wished the father not dead.

It seems that he takes his inheritance. That he himself receives the property that is coming to him. In verse 31, in our text today, the father even says, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

[15:47] It has already been granted to you. So this morning, you may have never placed believing faith in Jesus Christ.

You may identify with the older brother. You may look really good on the outside. But your obedience, your imperfect obedience, I must add, is not aimed at the pleasure and glory of God, but at yourself.

You think that if you live just so, you will earn God's favor. And this type of thinking is damning. Do not be like the younger brother, turn to God in Christ.

Do not be like the older brother, turn to God in Christ. Recognize that no amount of your working will ever earn you a place in his kingdom.

James wrote in James 2, verse 10, For whoever keeps the whole law, but fails in one point, has become guilty of all of it.

[17:01] Apart from the righteousness that is given to us by Christ, that is found in Him, His perfect life, all of us are utterly doomed.

We cannot fill the void that our sin created. It is impossible. And that's what this older brother thinks that he's accomplishing.

The offer of the gospel is that by faith in the perfect life, the perfect death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, you can have your record of guilt expunged, and you can have the righteousness of Jesus.

You can be saved from God's wrath, by God's mercy, to God's presence. What a glorious truth.

Now, some of you, I think most of you, have placed believing faith in Jesus Christ.

That's the status you hold this morning, right? Beloved of God, you are in Christ. But we are so quick to forget the great love of the Father for us, and so quick to either presume upon His grace with licentious living, or believe we can earn His grace with legalism.

[18:24] Those who are in Christ err in both ways all the time. By thinking we can live however we want because we're in Christ, or thinking still that somehow we're not pleasing to God because we're just not good enough.

And both are errors. Beloved, you are saved by grace alone through faith alone. Your faith will produce obedience in you.

It will produce obedience in you. But let it be from a grateful heart that loves to please and glorify God the Father. It's a response to the work He's accomplished on your behalf.

On the front of your bulletin is your, it seems like almost weekly Spurgeon quote. Although, this is a Spurgeon quote where Spurgeon is quoting Martin Luther.

So, extra quote this morning. Listen to this. He says, The whole Bible tells us from beginning to end that salvation is not by the works of the law but by the deeds of grace.

[19:37] Martin Luther declared that he constantly preached justification by faith alone because, said he, the people would forget it so that I was obliged almost to knock my Bible against their heads, to send it into their hearts.

So it is true, we constantly forget that salvation is by grace alone. So even those of us who aren't off trying to earn salvation in an absolute sense or off living licentiously, rejecting God at every turn, those of us who are, in fact, restored to God in Christ can still err in one of these two ways.

Let it not be so amongst us. So that's the failing love of the oldest son for his father. Secondly, the failing love of the oldest son for his younger brother.

In verse 30, the oldest brother says of his younger brother, but when this son of yours came, he does not say when my younger brother came, he says, when this son of yours came, he just altogether disowns his brother.

Parents, do you ever do that to your spouse? I do sometimes. So you'll never believe what your son just said. That's in effect what he is doing, although I do it with laughter.

[21:12] He's doing it with anger, right? He is not concerned at all about his younger brother. But this type of disowning had happened long before in Jesus' story.

The oldest brother made no attempt to reason with his younger brother. He did not try to stop him from sitting against the father so egregiously. And he did not seek his return and restoration.

Right? That would have been the appropriate thing to happen in this day. Right? The father to stay at home, master of his domain. It's the oldest brother that should have gone out and sought the younger brother and brought the younger brother home.

In fact, we can see from the text that the oldest brother knew where his younger brother was. This distant land, he was aware of it and he knew what he was up to. But it did not go to him.

He says to the father, this young son of yours who has devoured your property with prostitutes. He knows what he has been up to. He could have gone and sought him out.

[ 22 : 17 ] The oldest brother failed to love the younger brother. At this point, if you're in Christ, I want you to long for the younger brother to have a better oldest brother.

A brother that would humble himself by going on a long journey for his younger brother's return and restoration. A brother who would gladly share his inheritance with his younger brother.

A brother who leads his younger brother in grateful obedience. A brother who would rejoice to see his father rejoice in his return.

Praise God that if you are in Christ, we have a perfect older brother, Christ himself. But that is not this brother.

That is not who this brother is. He goes on to say, you killed the fattened calf for him. And it needs to resonate around in your head the accusation that the scribes and the Pharisees railed against Jesus.

[ 23 : 26 ] Right? The oldest brother is saying to the father, you have received a sinner and are eating with him. If the oldest brother loved the father, he would have also loved what the father loves.

the younger brother. He would have also loved the younger brother. You may find yourself this morning in Christ, but loving what the world loves.

You just want to celebrate with some of your friends. But what does the father love? The father loves the restoration of his sons.

The parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin are about the rejoicing in heaven over sinners who repent. Jesus says in Luke 19.10, For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.

This is why Jesus came to earth. Jesus, the perfect oldest brother, came to find the lost and he has given us the same charge.

[ 24 : 35 ] Paul writes to the Corinthian church in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 18 and following, All this is from God, and he's talking about the new creations that we are in the preceding verses.

All this is from God who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. So, sons restored, now given the ministry of reconciliation.

That is, this is verse 19, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

And so you see, as Christ is the perfect oldest brother, right, as he has come and sought and saved, we have been given the same charge to go and to seek and to save, and we ought not, as God's sons, disregard anybody for that mission.

[ 25 : 46 ] We're to go, and we're to go far to the very ends of the earth. It means your neighbor, and it means the person that doesn't speak the language that anybody knows yet, all the way to the ends of the earth to bring God's sons home.

And so that's the failing love, boy, I screwed it up there, the failing love of the son for his younger brother. May it not be so amongst us. And then thirdly, let's look at the unailing love of the father for his oldest son.

The father extends the same love he has for the younger brother to the oldest brother. The father's love is unailing.

When the oldest son was angry and refused to go in, what does the father do? He comes out and he entreats him, which means he urged or implored or encouraged him to come in and join the celebration.

The father could have justly been angry with the oldest son for being outside fuming, not joining the celebration. He could have sent a message to him via a servant, get in here or else.

[ 27 : 07 ] But instead, he comes to him and he entreats him, don't be this way. You are my son. Love what I love.

Love what I love because I love you. And I hope to help you see the connection. He entreats him, join in the rejoicing of heaven for, verse 32, it was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive.

He was lost and is found. Jesus is making a plea to the Pharisees and the scribes to come to him by faith.

exactly what's going on in this story. So, you see, God's sons love what he loves and he loves to see sinners come to repentance.

He loves to restore those who are poor in spirit, to lavishly love those who return to him in humility. The Pharisees and the scribes were showing themselves to not be God's sons as they grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

[ 28 : 21 ] And so, Jesus tells them three parables as a mercy to them. Did they heed that warning? Sadly, no.

At least not most of those self-righteous religious elite of the day turned to God by faith in Christ. The story ends there and it ends rather abruptly and that's because Jesus has made his point. He has said the very thing that he was driving to say in these three parables. But there is a real life epilogue to the parable.

The oldest son, in his rage against the father, beats him to death. In John chapter 11, beginning in verse 45, this is after Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead.

And if my understanding is correct, it would have been about the same time. The parable of the two sons is only recorded in Luke's account.

[ 29 : 35 ] This particular record is only in John's account, but I think they were happening at about the same time. Verse 45 and following, many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, raising Lazarus from the dead, believed in him.

But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, what are we to do?

For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him. And the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.

Hear what they're concerned about. This man is performing these miracles, right? Raised a man from the dead. They're not so concerned about whether or not it actually even happened.

They seem to believe that it did. But if he keeps doing this kind of thing, if he rises up as a ruler, people are going to be following him and Rome is not going to like it.

[ 30 : 37 ] And what will happen? We will lose our place and our nation, our status. We will not have the power that we presently enjoy.

Verse 49, But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, You know nothing at all, nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.

This is fascinating. He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. But their understanding of it was rather perverted, wasn't it?

They were saying, if we can kill this guy and get him out of the way, we can keep on going the way we are. Rather than seeing that the words that God was speaking through him, would be to say that Christ came to die for them on their behalf, that they might come to God by faith in him.

It's a very interesting turn there. And then verse 52 says, the older brother beats the father to death.

[ 32 : 03 ] Praise be to God that he purposed that Jesus should die. that by the hands of wicked men our savior was murdered, but that three days later he declared victory over sin and death when he was raised from the dead, and that now we by faith may have life in him.

What they meant for evil, God meant for good. This morning let us rejoice in the unending love of the father. Join me in prayer.