

## The Lost Brother

Luke 15:25-32

November 21, 2021

This morning we do have one more chance to look at Luke 15, so if you turn there in your Bibles, you'll be right in the right place. This is the parable of two lost sons and a, a very loving father.)) We have in our study over the past few weeks, we've seen the prodigal son. We've looked at the loving father last week and today we come to the second son, the elder brother, who is also lost.

Starting back in verse 11 of Luke 15, Jesus has been telling this story. It's the third part of a single parable that he delivered in response to the Pharisees and the scribes and these religious leaders were criticizing Jesus because he was receiving the tax collectors and the sinners, who were all coming to him and he had, he had the audacity to even eat with them, which showed a, that table fellowship demonstrated his

acceptance with them, his reconciliation with them that they were in company with him and he with them.

So this was offensive to them as religious leaders in that society they counted them to be unclean and if he, mixing with them, if he was doing that, then he himself was unclean, and that's how they hoped to disparage him, that's how they hoped to diminish his visibility and his ministry. So, verse 3, he told them this parable.

This parable, singular. Luke tells us this is one single parable, everything that follows from verse 3. There are three parts, but it is a single parable with a single message, and it is this message. God the Father rejoices to send his son to seek lost sinners, having found them, to save them, and to bring them back home and celebrate the grace of God.

That's the message of Luke 15. That's the single message you get when you combine all three of these, we might call them mini parables; a shepherd seeks his lost sheep and finds it and

rejoices with his friends; a woman seeks a lost coin and finds it and rejoices with her friends and now, we see a father who seeks his lost son and he finds him and he rejoices with his friends. He rejoices with all who will share in his joy.

And as we'll see today, there is one holdout to that joy, that celebration. There's one exception. There's one who refuses to share his joy, and that's the eldest son. That's the brother of the prodigal, the one who has really hidden his heart from others. He's the one who indulges himself in more respectable sins. He's the one who plays the hypocrite, and himself is in such desperate need of salvation.

Some believe that the prodigal represents the non-Christian and the elder brother represents the Christian. It's how they divide this up. Christian, non-Christian. And while it's true that no one finds salvation in God who does not follow the same route as the prodigal, we need to see that both the older and the younger brother are the targets of the father's love and his desire to seek lost sinners.

Every sinner who finds salvation in Christ, every sinner who is reconciled to God, he comes to see himself as the prodigal. Every single sinner, older brother, younger brother, everybody in between, every sibling in that, corrupt children of wrath family. Every single one sees himself as the prodigal, utterly destitute, enslaved to sin, dressed in nothing but filthy rags, penniless, friendless, degraded, depraved, and without any hope whatsoever in the world. When God comes to him in that condition, it's God who takes the initiative, it's God who grants regenerating grace. The sinner recognizes in that grace, he recognizes that he is truly poor in spirit, he is spiritually destitute.

He recognizes what his condition really is and he is humbled to the core, mourns over his sins. He mourns over his sins. He doesn't look lightly upon his sins. He, he grieves over them, and that's the evidence that the grace has taken hold of him and then God in Christ, runs to the guilty sinner in compassion, embraces him in his love, kisses him with a kiss of reconciliation and it's a picture of God justifying the penitent sinner, covering him in the white robes of Christ's righteousness in that moment.

It grants him in that moment the right of sonship and the full privileges of the Kingdom of God all at his access in Christ. The reconciled sinner, having been immersed like this in divine grace, he becomes a meek person. A reconciled sinner is not pushing his weight around. He's not demanding his rights. He's humble, he's teachable, he's someone who is eager to serve others and to show the love that's been shown to him. He hungers, even thirsts for righteousness, which is why he's often in the company of the redeemed. He is eager to be among the saints, eager to hear the word preached, to obey the word that's proclaimed to him.

He's attending to the regular means of grace, communion, Lord's table, fellowship of the saints, partnering in the Gospel. He prioritizes any opportunity he can find to assemble with the saints. That is what salvation looks like. It's the pathway of salvation which every Christian takes, no matter what kind of sinner he or she may have been. That's the character of every true Christian, humble, meek, rejoicing in the truth, celebrating the grace of God in the household of faith.

There are others, however, who remain aloof. There are those who stand apart. They take really the posture of the older brother. They are the proud. They are those who are of a critical spirit. They think they know all the answers. Thank you very much. They are the judges. They are the critics. They find reasons everywhere they look for complaining for grumbling, faultfinding, usually targeting other human beings, but ultimately their gripe is with God, not with man.

So the father here in our text in verse 23, he has called for a celebration, hasn't he? He's called for a celebration. He wants everyone to come into his home and share in his joy, verse 24. Why is that father? "Because this son of mine was dead and he's alive again. He was lost and he's found."

Proud sinners are aloof from that. They're critical, they refused to come near. They refused to enter in and celebrate. These are the ones who are portrayed by the older brother in this story. These are the targets of Jesus parable, which is the entire 15th chapter of Luke.

I wonder sometimes, where Christians, true Christians who have entered in through the narrow gate and they walk on the narrow road, and they count themselves to be the prodigal of prodigals as they come to salva, come to faith in Christ and they look behind them. And they see wow, what a deep mess of mud that I was wallowing with the rest of the pigs!

They marvel that God would be so gracious to reach down and save them, but often it happens that overtime they lose sight of what God did for them. They lose sight of the love of God. They lose sight of compassion for sinners. And they start to resemble over time, becoming old and crusty and embittered, they pile up a list of grievances, different ways people have hurt them, and they don't let go of that bitterness, and they don't forgive. I wonder if sometimes even Christians can fall into this pattern exhibited by the older brother here.

If that could be you. Perhaps today is a day of great deliverance. Perhaps today is a day of freedom for you. Where your heart can be unshackled from the bitterness and unshackled

from the resentment where you can finally forgive, where you can finally free those who you think that have hurt you so deeply. The older brother in this story is not one of those Christians who has wandered away.

The older brother in this story is picturing the Pharisees and the scribes. Not a Christian, not a believer, not a lover of God, not a lover of Jesus Christ. What many would argue, It's interesting because what many would argue is most the greatest, the richest, the most detailed, the most beautiful parable that Jesus ever told, notice that he has directed this parable to the very worst of his critics.

He's delivered this beautiful story to those who were constantly criticizing him. Dogging his steps, eager to catch him at any moment that he turned around. Notice he delivers this beautiful story to those who would ultimately crucify him. Such amazing love displayed by our Lord and Savior, amen?

When we ended last time in verse 24 they had just begun to celebrate. So first point for this morning, if you're taking notes, we just want to clarify exactly whose celebration this is and what exactly it is that they are celebrating. So I'll just give you the punch line to those questions in the point, point number one, this is number one, the father's joyful celebration. This is the father's joyful celebration.

People tend to focus on the prodigal as if he is the one who's being congratulated at this party. It's understandable, after all, his story has been the focus. His story has occupied our attention for most of this chapter, but really, he's been an object, a target of the father's efforts. His rescue is a tribute to the father's wisdom, the father's compassion, the father's kindness and love. The prodigal, who is now returned and reconciled, he's not there by his own merits. He stands in their midst in that company as a trophy of the father's grace.

He's a trophy, he's a symbol that points to what the father has done, so it's not pointing at himself. It's pointing at him. That's clear in the telling of the story as Jesus here

has studiously avoided using any language of repentance, even though it's pictured here. He avoids language of repentance. The verb *metanoeo*, or synonyms to repentance like *epistrepho*, to turn, to return.

There are plenty of opportunities here to talk about the son returning, or turning away, on returning to his home. Jesus avoids the language because that could confuse people into thinking he repented on his own, that's not what he's done. Lots of language here about coming and going, no language about repenting, turning, returning. It's not there, it's pictured, but it's not there. So the party is not for celebrating the son.

It's not for everyone in the village to come and congratulate him because he's repented because he's returned to the home. You finally got your act together, kid. Welcome back, pat him on the back. You know it's never accurate really to congratulate a Christian for having faith. As if it were his own doing, we just read that in Ephesians 2:8, clearly tells us it's not our own doing. "By grace you have been saved through faith.

This is not your own doing. It is a gift of God. It's not a result of works, so that no one may boast."

The party is to boast about the father. The party is in honor of the father. The party is to celebrate his role in saving his son, because he's essentially here raised his dead son to life, he found his lost son and brought him home. And so the party is for him, not to honor the prodigal, but to glorify him in the work of the prodigal. The prodigal gets no glory here, the father gets all the glory.

He's the one who had compassion. He's the one who's used great wisdom. He's the one who took initiative, ran out ahead of the village, and he effected the rescue of this undeserving prodigal. Listen, I'll just add this by way of a footnote. This is why boasting in our past is so unfitting. We noticed in all three baptismal testimonies that not a lot of great detail is brought to light about the past. That's intentional. That's by design. We never want to glory in past sins.

Whenever I hear someone make much over themselves about how lost they were in former life, whenever I hear them tell tales of how bad they were or how terrible things were, how sinful, it's often a sign of immaturity. It's likely the evidence of a subtle pride that needs to be still mortified. Whenever the focus is on self, whether it's in a positive sense and uplifting the self and pointing out great we are, or in a negative sense about how terrible we are, how proud we are, how terrible our past was, how horrible our sins were that we committed. There's a subtle lot, pride lurking there, ready to take us down.

Because it gets the focus and the attention on ourselves and not ultimately on Christ. Watch out for that. Well, the people who are listening to Jesus tell this story. They know this. They understand intuitively they know what the villagers would have been thinking because they themselves are villagers. They know that none of the villagers would come to a party in honor of this prodigal son. There is nothing in him to commend him to anyone whatsoever.

Everything about his life has been total disgrace until the father got a hold of him. Until the father embraced him and hugged him and threw himself on his neck and kissed him and covered him with his own robe and put his ring on his finger and restored him into the house, that's the father's doing. The son only repents in light of the father's love. He took initiative, the son responded.

So they're not going to come to a party to commend the son, to rejoice over him. They will come to a party to honor the father, that is fitting that is appropriate. Now at this point, we've got to imagine that Jesus' audience is feeling very uncomfortable in this whole telling of the story.

The whole, the whole thing, has left them feeling deeply unsettled and ill at ease because it has been one scratch of the record after another, one scratch of the chalkboard with fingernails after another. All of it violating all their cultural, social, sensibilities. The story here started with a shockingly abhorrent behavior of this man's youngest son. Leading to some, inevitably bad, consequences for that

disgraceful behavior and when the son had the audacity to hatch a plan to come back to the village, earn back his father's money, earn back his lost reputation, Jesus' audience thinks that the punch line of the story will be in the outcome of the plan.

They're asking, will he succeed, will he restore himself? Will he pull himself up by his own bootstraps? Get back in the game and have a life ever after? Or another option, will the villagers find him? Will they perform that dreaded *kezazah* ceremony and banish him from their midst? Big question, will justice be served?

Because in their minds, justice would be served either way. It would be just and right for him to pull himself back up. It would be just as just and right, and maybe even in their evil little hearts they're thinking even better for him to be punished, banished. Well, due to the father's gracious intervention, what they expected, what they had hoped for even didn't happen, did it?

The son didn't work his way back. The village didn't deliver the due punishment for his sins, so in their minds, justice at this point is forsaken because of the father's indulgence. This is unacceptable and they feel set up at this point. They're totally dissatisfied. They're ready to revolt and walk away, if Jesus weren't so captivating.

This is exactly where Jesus, the master storyteller, this is exactly where he wants them. Especially the Pharisees, especially the scribes. He takes the unstated questions of their hearts about justice, about rightness, about what's fitting, what's appropriate, and he throws them up on the big screen for everybody to see. Story should be finished at this point.

It should resolve beautifully in the father's joy and everyone barring none who celebrate the father's joy, but for those who are dissatisfied, for those who remain unsettled and want, the father managed to pull off here. Jesus addresses those unresolved questions about justice, about fairness, about what's right and in so doing, he fulfills the purpose for which he started telling the story in the first place.

Remember how he started the story back in verse 11? He's telling a story about a man who had two sons. The younger of the two sons has had the center stage. His sins are the more prominent ones. They're the obvious sins, the ones that you can't ignore because they're all external. He lives his life on the edge. He wears his heart on his sleeve and everybody could see it, easy to judge him.

But his older brother is in the background. He's mentioned, but he's hidden. He's mentioned even in verse 12, but he's really been hidden from view until now. And for anyone in Jesus audience who is paying close attention, the older son's behavior here is somewhat puzzling. For example, when the younger son said, verse 12, father give me the share of property that's coming to me. I mean, they're caught up in the shock of that kind of statement that he's basically saying, father, I want you dead because I want you, I want my inheritance, I want it now. I don't want to wait around until you're, you know, six feet under. Just give me the goods. Give me the stuff so I can go off and do my thing.

It's reprehensible and were caught up in that moment, but the but it really the older brother, he's there too. He ought to be the first to rebuke that younger brother of his. He really ought to be the one who strikes him in the face to get his younger brother's attention, to confront his younger brother, correct him. How dare you say that to dad.

The father should never have had to deal with such a brazen play for his money, not from anyone, let alone his own son, his flesh and blood. No rebuke came. No slap of correction. No stinging rebuke. Instead, the older brother seems to have acquiesced at this point, he's accepted the distribution of his father's estate because he divided up between both sons. He goes along with it.

None of that is said overtly, mind you, but Jesus has included those dynamics in this story. He's the master storyteller, again, he's, he's setting the stage here early. But the point that he's going to make later, which is now for us today. But I'm telling you, everyone listening would have made

that mental note. Everyone listening, it would be for them like a splinter in the brain. They're left wondering what's up with the older brother. That's an unclosed loop in their mind. It's unanswered question. It's an unresolved problem for them. What happened to him?

Well, Jesus comes back in verse 25 and tells us what happened to him. "Now his older son was in the field." After hearing a story about a profligate son left unpunished. The crowd, ah, it's finally feeling some sense of relief. Okay, alright, we're returning to the older son now alright, good the good boy, the farmer he's back on the farm he's doing what an older son is supposed to be doing, like what all righteous people do, they farm right? Maybe there's some justice that will come out of this convoluted tale, after all.

The crowd shifts its attention now to the older brother. They find in him their hero. He's the hometown boy. He's the poster child for true Judaism. Pharisees especially, the scribes too, they found nothing whatsoever to commend in the younger son, nothing to commend the father, but they see in the

villagers there's some justice that could be had, and now that that's been set aside, now they see, ah, the older brother. Here's where our hopes are going to be fulfilled. Here's where Jesus, the great rabbi, he's going to get to the good part.

All their hope for justice, for propriety, for a proper and fitting end to the story. It's all wrapped up in the older brother, and they're all wondering what is his take on what all that's happened. What is his take on his younger brother coming home and his father throwing a party? What's his take? What is his view of this unwarranted celebration? We begin to find out in verse 25. "Now his older son was in the field and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music, and dancing."

This picks up the theme of distance, right? That we already saw in the younger son. He's so far out that it takes a while before he can even hear the music and the dancing, the *symphonia*, and the chorus. Those are the two Greek words. *Symphonia*, meaning a group of musicians who play a variety of instruments. In their day, it would have been lyres and dulcimers and flutes. There'd be a drum to keep time for the

chorus. The chorus was leading that traditional round dance that the guests would participate in. Musicians would play the drum, kept time, the guests dance.

And this is all happening, by the way, when the older son is out in the field, he's ostensibly doing what he's supposed to be doing. He's a nobleman, so he's a master of his father's estate, so you, you know he's not doing any manual labor out there. He's got no calluses on his hands, he's more like supervising the farm workers, you know, carrying the clipboard, drinking sips of coffee, you know the type. Doing that all day, barking orders. Without his knowledge, without any consultation with him whatsoever, a party has started back at the house and he has no idea.

Why? Because he is far away. Somewhat distant on what's apparently a very large estate, there's a vast acreage here and he's far away. He's in the back 40. And the distance here is more than geographical. The distance here is relational. This is a metaphor. Jesus is foreshadowing here. He is showing us that the older son, like his younger brother, he's also at a great

distance from the father. It's far enough away that he has no clue what's going on back at home. Relationally he's got no idea of what's going on in the father's world and in the father's heart.

As the older son came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing, in verse 26, says he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. If he were close to his father, drawing near to the house and hearing the festivities, don't you think that would lift his heart? Build his anticipation? He, I mean he'd be eager to get back and see why his dad threw a party excited about jumping into the mix.

His aim would be to get right in the house as soon as possible. Talk with his father, figure out what's going on and after all as the master of the house, he's got a very important role to play in serving this great banquet. He's got to get up to speed. He's got to get educated in a hurry because he wants to serve his father's interest.

If he were close to the father drawing near the house, hearing his, those festivities would build his anticipation, wouldn't it, and he'd be anticipating joy not, not dark thoughts. Upon arriving home, his first priority should be to go to his father to know the meaning. He should go to his father to get the reason to get the explanation of what's going on, and then he can enter into his joy and then he can serve the purpose of glorifying his father's work and his father's grace.

But instead, verse 26, he summons a servant. The relational distance between the father and the eldest son is even more clearly revealed. The tension builds and grows here as we come into a second point for your outline. Number two, the young boy's simple explanation, the young boy's simple explanation. I know the ESV translates it as servant. He summons a servant, but it's best translated as young boy here.

The word is *pais* or *paidas* that can refer to social status like a servant or a slave, but since all the slaves are going to be inside the house attending to the party, not hanging around outside the house, this refers to a group of boys. It says one

of the boys, so there's a masculine forms here, plural boys, so these are male children and he called over to himself one of the young boys. So who are these boys who are hanging around outside the house? They're the villagers' kids.

Okay, so the adults are on the inside. They're talking, eating, mixing, dancing, eating hors d'oeuvres, and all the rest. The kids are outside and they're hanging around and they're joy, enjoying some unsupervised time together as young boys often like to do. You young boys think you're off our radar, you're not. We can imagine that as young boys do, they had overheard earlier in the day on the way to the father's house. They overhear their parents talking about the dramatic events that day.

What had happened? The younger son showed up. He narrowly escaped by this much the village banishment due to his father's timely intervention, shameful intervention even, he showed his legs running across town, crazy. Summed up in a simple report that we get from the child, the young boy in verse 27. Elder son draws near to the house, he hears the music, and it says he

called one of the young boys and asked him what these things meant. "He said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf. Because he has received him back safe and sound.'"

Notice what the young boy highlights here. Notice what stands out to him. First the simple, straightforward, report, "Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf." Notice he uses relational terms. Familial terms, your brother, your father. This is for him about family. This boy has brothers too. He has a father. He sees this reunion as a good thing, right?

Second, notice this simple, straightforward explanation for the father's celebration here. "Your father has killed the fatted calf," why is that? "because he's received him back safe and sound." This is a good thing. Younger brother estranged from father. They've come back. He's received him safe and sound. That's a good thing.

The verb he uses that's translated safe and sound, it's a single verb, *hygiano*. We get our word hygiene from that, *hygiano*. The English translations give us two words safe and sound. It at least means safe and sound, but here it's far more than that. In the New Testament, *hygiano* can refer to physical health, it can refer to mental soundness, wholeness. When Jesus healed the Centurion's son back in Luke 7:10 the Centurion's emissaries returned back to the house after being with Jesus, and separated from the sick child, the sick boy, they find the boy well. He's physically sound. He's no longer about to die. So *hygiano* can refer to physical health it can refer to physical soundness.

The word *hygiano* also refers to, all throughout Paul's pastoral epistles, it refers to doctrinal integrity. It refers to soundness in the truth, so it's a mental, spiritual, theological, doctrinal soundness. Everything's right, everything's healthy. Paul's instructions to Timothy and Titus as pastors they are to maintain the standard of sound words. That's the word *hygiano*. They're to teach sound doctrine. That's *hygiano*, according to the pattern of sound words, *hygiano*. So Christians will be *hygiano*, sound in the faith.

The words, the doctrine, the faith, they are to be sound, *hygiano*, that is corresponding accurately to the truth, there to be in full and perfect accordance to divinely revealed truth. Another way we might say it, the words in the doctrine they're to be in right relationship to the truth. They are to be perfectly integrated into the truth and the truth into those words.

And all that teaching, all that doctrine, all that sound speech in the pattern of sound words, results in a Christian who lives in right relationship to the truth. A life perfectly integrated with the truth and the result is that he is healthy and sound spiritually. If there's anything that we know from the context, when the younger son arrived, he was not in a safe and sound condition, nor did he have good hygiene. All of this applied to him. But all those external issues, his hygiene, his smell, his filthy clothes, his hunger, his weakness, his tiredness from the long journey, that wearing himself out, the being penniless and broke, all those things are manifestations externally of a much deeper, profound problem spiritually, aren't they?

He is unsound spiritually. He is unsound relationally. The relationship to his father is unhealthy. It is fundamentally unsound and broken. Another place where this word, *hygiano*, shows up. It's in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint. In a dozen places or so in the Septuagint, it uses the word *hygiano* to translate the Hebrew word *shalom*. In fact, every place that shows up in the Septuagint, *hygiano* translates *shalom* the more often more common word, New Testament word for the, or Greek word for the term Shalom is *eirene*, *eirene* means peace.

One of the folks in baptism quoted from Romans 5, mentioned Romans 5. We have peace with God, that's *eirene*. *Shalom* though, is a broad, broad word. It encompasses all these aspects we've talked about, but it's basic meaning at its very root, *shalom* means wholeness, it means completeness, it means, in this case, relationally, it means reconciliation. It's relational component of *shalom*, it's impossible to ignore here.

This is the context is a relational rupture between the father and the son. Uses relational terms, this kid uses relational terms as report back to the older son, father, brother. So when the young boy tells his eldest son, your brother has come, and "Your father has killed the fatted calf" and adds this explanation "because he's received him back, safe and sound," he's not talking about hygiene. He's not talking about physical safety. He's not talking about financial wholeness and soundness.

Even this young boy knows, that's not what prompted this great celebration, reconciliation is. This young child is giving the simple, straightforward report of the truth. This young boy is answering the elder brother's inquiry in verse 26, telling him what these things meant, here is the meaning. The broken relationship between your brother and your father is now restored, it's now in a state of *shalom*. The relationship is no longer broken apart, it's *hygiano*, it's reconciled.

The two are at peace with one another. It's good news, right? I mean, it's the very best of news. I mean, if there's

any reason to throw a party, we've got so many superficial reasons for throwing parties, but look, this is a reason. I'm guessing this kid, this young boy, he is fully expecting on delivering this very simple, straightforward report to the older brother. He's expecting a huge smile to form on the older brother's face, his eyes to light up, for him to go rushing into the house to find his father, out of just unmitigated joy. Embrace his brother, he'll rejoice over his father's wisdom and pulling off the impossible, reconciling his lost son, the party will go on.

That's not what we see, is it? What seems so simple and straightforward to a young boy is completely lost on an older resentful brother. Brings us to a third Point. Number three, the brother's resentful disposition. The brother's resentful disposition.

Just a footnote, as you're writing that down. You know what's amazing about that simple, straightforward report from the young boy? Jesus has put the thesis for this final act, which is really the crux of the entire parable, he's put this

thesis into the mouth of a young boy. Eleven, twelve, thirteen years old, whatever. It's really a child who makes the, the meaning here as plain as it could be, for everybody listening to the story.

What's the implication of that? Even a child can understand what had just happened, doesn't take a genius. This isn't rocket science. Even a child can see the beauty of a reconciled relationship between father and son and listen if a young boy can get it, if he can see the simple, straightforward reason that a father would want to celebrate over this, well then the elder brother is certainly to get it, right?

Wrong, instead verse 28, "but he was angry and refused to go in." Okay, now why might that be? Hearing this simple report, "your brother has come," well, that's the first thing that started his stomach churning. The acids are starting to flow inside of his stomach, his brother has returned.

His brother's departure raised plenty of questions in the community for him to answer. Created some real problems in the management of the family's holdings in this state in the enterprises of the family. Took a third of the chunk of money away from the family estate, that he could no longer use to invest, get credit and all the rest. Created a lot of problems this kid.

Hearing the second fact of the report, "Your father has killed the fatted calf." Well, that reminded him right in his face, of the financial component of this whole fiasco, for which his younger prodigal brother is fully to blame. His father's extravagance in throwing a party, it's a painful reminder of his brother's extravagance, and why they're here in the first place. That which adversely affected his profit and loss statement, he's come home and his father's just joining in.

Deeper still, for the brother, the older brother, it's not the financial loss of just one fatted calf that troubled him. What bugged him was the reason for it. Your father's killed the fatted calf because he's received him back safe and sound, or

because he's received him back in *shalom*. He's received him back in peace. In other words, he's angry because the father of his own initiative of his own accord, reconciled this relationship.

As, Kenneth Bailey puts it this boy, quote, "Tells the older son that the father has received a sinner, is in process of sitting down with and eating with him, this is precisely the complaint of the Pharisees against Jesus." End quote. The older brother here, he's a picture of the Pharisees and the scribes, who are making the same complaint that Jesus receives, sinners and eats with them. He has got the same gripe against his father. His father never checked with him; he's the oldest son.

He's the master of the house now. It's been decided. Didn't check with him before deciding to reconcile with his younger son. I mean, what were the arrangements, by the way? Where's the contract signed with his blood, about his future here, what provisions are in the contract and why was he not consulted? He is the eldest, is going to be expected to rejoice with his father's decision and honor his father in public. But in his heart, he despised his father.

He hated this decision. He is the eldest, he's going to be even, worse for him, he's going to be required, expected to act as master of ceremonies at the feast. Guess what? He gets to serve the guest of honor. Guess who that is? Ah, the younger son, sitting there next to his father, his father there being honored as well with the trophy next to him holding up his trophy for redemption.

This stupid prodigal brother, the older brothers got to serve that. No wonder he's angry. The verb, *orgizo*, to become furious, to be enraged. He's lost his temper here. He's seething in his anger. Again, back to Jesus' audience, they're fully sympathetic. I mean they get this; they are with the elder brother at this point. This is their man. He's the one who stayed. He's a hard worker. He's out in the field. He's the one who always knows what propriety demands. He's the one who knows what decency requires. He is ready at all times to do his duty and serve his father's honor. Now they've got a problem, don't they? The audiences has sympathized with the elder son, but now they're caught on the horns of a dilemma.

Should he swallow his pride and honor his father here, or should he stick with his principles and refuse to enter, but shaming his father? Well we, not left wondering. Jesus says, "He refused to go in." Imperfect tense there, so it's, it's a continuous idea in the past tense, so it's he was refusing to go inside, like as in repeatedly, as in over and over refusing.

This indicates that there were repeated attempts to get him to come inside to take his position to play his role. Slaves and servants probably came out and appealed to him. Some of the guests, even friends of his father. No one could get him to soften his hard heart. We've got a real public relations problem here with this family. I mean this is, this is dysfunction, high order.

When the elder brother returned from the field, the meal had not yet been served. Festivities had commenced. But everyone is waiting, mixing, mingling, dancing, enjoying music, enjoying some finger foods, and all the rest. But they're waiting for the elder son to return as the master of the state he had a

leadership role to play. He's the one who starts the official celebration.

He's the one who kicks off the serving of the formal meal. No one is going to eat until he kicks things off. Worse than that though, not only are they hungry, but by refusing to come in and start the meal and at least greet the guests, the eldest son has shamed his father, and he's done so in public. I mean, his younger brother had shamed his father in private. He's doing it in public. Airing his grievances with all these guests inside. People of the village whom his father had invited this is shameful behavior.

By the time the news of his, of his impudence, his insolence, reached the ears of the father, that his older son's arrival, his anger, his refusal to enter listen everybody knew about it. You know how small towns are, everybody knows. Demonstrating his protest against his father's clear wishes, this is neither the time nor the place, but the disdain that he shows to his father here is palpable. His contempt for his father is now visible.

What was hidden in his heart, is now made known, shameful treatment of his father is now public. There's no hiding it now. He truly has traded places with his brother. Not as the prodigal, no, but as a contemptuous, angry rebel of a son, he's a malcontent.

Look how he answered his father, in verse 29, "Look," or more literally, it's behold, like pay attention to me. Listen to what I have to say. Look at me when I'm talking to you. That's the force that it's coming out with. He doesn't even pay his father the courtesy of addressing him. Just starts commanding him.

Even his brother, the shameful prodigal, verse 21, even he called him father. By contrast, he can't even muster a modicum of respect to address his dad to call him father. He just jumps straight into his complaint. He is so angry. This is years of bitterness welling up within him that he's hidden, he's kept repressed, he's shoved down, he's stifled, and now it's ready to blow.

"Look these many years I've served you. I've never disobeyed your command. You never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends. When this son of yours," Can't call him his brother, "when this son of yours came, who's devoured your property with prostitutes, you kill the fatted calf for him." Lips are dripping with contempt for his father. There's a litany of contrast to portray himself as the hero, everyone else as villains in this bitter diatribe. "I have served you, but he has devoured your property with prostitutes. I never disobeyed your command, but you don't reward me for my obedience, not even a young goat." I can't even get a young goat out of you, but you killed the fatted calf for him. All I wanted was to celebrate with my friends, all good upstanding noble people like me. But he, he devours your money with prostitutes and all their ilk. The very worst of company.

Don't you see the contrast here? His little speech is saturated with self-righteousness. Bitter contempt for his father. Blinded isn't he by pride? Which is always the way with self-righteous hypocrites. They're deluded in their bloated self-estimation. He takes the very worst view possible of his

father. He ignores all his father's goodness, all his many kindnesses. In fact he's standing there as master of the house, why, because his father built up an entire state and handed him a double portion of it free. Instead of magnifying his father's goodness, he accuses him of a profound and lifelong injustice.

First, there's the injustice of failing to reward him. Verse 29, "These many years I've served you." Serve that's pretty soft. He used the word for enslavement, which is *douleuo*. Oh, I've been slaving away for you. You've been mistreating me for years. So it's systemic, this enslavement. I'm sick of it and I'm sick of you. Despite of your enslavement in spite of your master slave relationship with me, I never disobeyed your command, ever.

Oh, really. Hold on to that thought. We're going to come back to that in a moment, but let's just pass it by for now, even though so obviously wrong, he continues, he says In spite of my perfect record in service to you. You never gave me a young goat. I never disobeyed you. You never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. You took him to

Ruth's Chris steakhouse; me and my buddies can't even get happy meals at the drive thru. In spite of my perfect record and service to you, you gave me nothing.

Second, he also accuses him, in verse 30, of the injustice of failing to punish his brother. "When this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him." What's this? Legitimate charge we don't know for sure early on in the text, we don't know for sure that he's, this younger brother has cavorted with prostitutes. He may have. It's not beyond the realm of possibility.

What is he doing here? He's making a Deuteronomy 21 charge against his brother and against his father. He's telling his father that he has failed to treat this kid as a rebellious and stubborn son. How he is, he's a glutton and a drunkard, and yet you have not done what Deuteronomy 21 requires of you to do. Deserves to be stoned by all the men of the city, but you, not only did you stand the way of the *Kezazah* ceremony, you celebrated this profligate.

You blew a huge chunk of money, my money, by the way, and threw him a party. The way Jesus is structured that sentence. He's front loaded it with all the evidences of the younger son's bad character which really implicates the father as well. He comes, you give, and you give prodigiously. In other words, he's saying, like father, like son. You did this to him. You did this.

When he squanders your wealth with prostitutes, you turn around and squander it yourself. You squander it right back. You encourage the gluttony. You encourage the partying. An over indulgent father has produced an, a self-indulgent son. Any surprises here? Any mystery? Notice also how he refused to call him brother, my brother. Rather, "this son of yours." He wants no association with him at all. He doesn't want to address his father, as father. He doesn't want to call his brother, brother.

Basically, he's saying, if this right, here is what this family is like under your leadership, if this is what this family is like, receiving prodigals, eating with them, I want no part in this family. Isn't it the same thing that the prodigal

son said to his dad when he left? Let's go back to that incredible claim in verse 29. "I never disobeyed your command." Never disobeyed.

I was surprised to read a commentator. Who is, you know, faithful in many ways, so I don't want to disparage him, but I, I was surprised to read this commentator who took that testimony of the elder son at face value. As if he never did disobey his father's command. This is what he wrote. "He has not disobeyed the father's orders, verse 29, and no greater service is expected from him. He has always been with the father. Their relationship is characterized in terms of the ontological relationship of Jesus and the Father. If the older son symbolizes the Pharisees, no portrait of them and all the New Testament is more positive." End quote. With respect, I beg to differ, this is not a positive portrayal of the Pharisees. Not in the slightest.

This is flaying them open and opening up the whitewashed tomb and showing all the dead man's bones that are inside. This is showing what's really in him. There is no reason to take this

elder son's testimony of himself at face value. Okay, so maybe he kept, when the father said go plow, he plowed, when he said go plant, he planted, when he said go harvest, he harvested. Okay, so maybe he followed orders. Was he in line with the father? Particularly in light of the profound dishonor that he shows his father by refusing to enter the house? By accusing the father of injustice? By blaming the father for the prodigal's prodigal behavior?

The elder, elder son here treats his father with dishonor. He slanders him. He resents him. He's angry with him. He's bitter at him. And he's contemptuous toward him. He hates his father. He hates his brother too. How can this be a positive portrait of the Pharisees? Does it really matter if they kept all the jot and tittle of the law? Does it really matter, if they kept all the rules. If they really harbored this kind of contempt, does it matter if they appear to be obedient, if they keep the letter of the law, if they violate the spirit and intent of the law with their hearts?

No matter of how hard they work in the field, if they really want no part in the father's home. The Pharisees, like the elder brother, they don't share the father's heart. They don't rejoice in the father's love. They have no gratitude for the father's kindness and grace. So I ask you, whose sin is worse? Prodigal, or the malcontent?

Is it the one who wanted his father's money from the start and made no pretense of hiding it? Or is it the one who would bide his time and be patient to get the whole estate? The one who played the hypocrite, the one who pretended friendship, the one who covered his contempt with feigned external obedience. Who's the worst sinner? God knows.

These are the secret sinners. These are those who hide their great contempt of heart with politeness, with social appropriateness. They cover their shame with their works of righteousness. Sure, the younger brother engaged in awful behavior, abhorrent living. He loved and pursued his sins.

But the older brother he's simply avoided certain sins, outward sins, and he's indulged himself in more respectable sins. The elder brother has taken the socially accepted route; the one that gives him praise in public, the one that boosts his reputation, the one that ups his credit, causes his star to rise, increases his social standing. His good works are done to serve a self-centered prideful motive. He's not virtuous in this. He's not more virtuous than his younger brother. He is less virtuous because he covered his wicked heart with a mask of respectability, with a mask of hypocrisy.

Listen, no amount of money. No amount of success or achievement, whether in the world or in the church. No degree of religious involvement. No degree of attainment. Church attendance. Adherence, adherence to standards and all the rest, none of that can erase the guilt of sins. Nothing can silence the accusing conscience that cries all the time, guilty, guilty, guilty as charged. My friend, if you're the older brother, you're the lost brother.

Salvation comes to you when you acknowledge that you are worse than the prodigal. Like Paul, you're numbered among the lowest of sinners. He counted himself the chief of sinners, that spots taken. But Paul was a Pharisee like this. Salvation comes to you when you number yourself after him because you thought you could mask your sin with your works, with your achievements, with your results, with your profitability, with your bottom line, and you've twisted God's justice to serve your own narrative that you are the righteous one, and you are in no need. You've twisted God justice to see yourself as the aggrieved party all the time and others, as the ones who cause you suffering, they are the oppressors, they are the victimizers, they are the abusers and it's me against the world.

Can I just plead with you to drop that narrative? Just drop it. You've twisted the concept of justice and made it a servant of your own sin. You've got to abandon that, and abandon it now. You got to cling to God's justice so you see yourself as nothing but a vile hypocrite. When you see his justice and your sin in contrast, you see yourself as nothing more than a vile hypocrite deserving the full penalty of divine justice, his wrath, death in an eternal hell, where we're conscious in that torment and

you're there, alongside all the tax collectors and all the sinners that you despised and condemned and you have to look up to them. If you humble yourself now before God, his grace means he'll lift you up.

By this time, Jesus' audience is feeling extreme discomfort. The Pharisees and the scribes had to be fuming at this point. Jesus is talking about them. He's exposing their letter of the law of obedience is nothing but hypocrisy. It's a mask that hides their loveless contempt for God. The religiosity is nothing but a deceit. It's covering a heart full of pride and greed.

Once again, another, another one of the father's sons has it coming big time. I mean, when his contempt is exposed like this, what does he deserve? The father has every right to slap his son across the face. Get in here, get in this house. Or even worse, to say you know what? Forget you, you're just. Hey servants, come over here. Jail him, put him away. I'll deal with him later. Punish him severely for his insolent pride, public

rebellion. Instead, it says his father came out and what, "entreated him."

Utterly shocking, brings us to a final point this morning. Final point, the father's, number four, the father's gentle confrontation. The father's gentle confrontation. It says, "The father entreated him." The verb *parakaleo* has the basic meaning to call someone to oneself. But the verb here is in the imperfect tense, which pictures the father, who's repeatedly imploring his son. He's continuously, earnestly pleading with him over and over and over again. My son, please don't do this. Please don't stay out here. Come inside, come inside with us. Come, come greet the guests. Mr. and Mrs. So and so is here come on come on over. Come see, see what's happened to your brother, it's remarkable. Talk with me, please. My son, don't be hard hearted. Soften your heart.

One commentator says, quote, "It's almost impossible to convey the shock that must have reverberated through the banquet hall when the father deliberately left his guests, humiliated himself before all, and went out in the courtyard to try to

reconcile his older son." End quote. Once again, just as we saw last week, the father inside the house is a picture of God the Father. The father who leaves the house, bearing the shame and the reproach and the humiliation, that is a picture of the incarnation. That is God in Christ coming to reconcile the world to himself. It's happening here.

The father leaves the party, pleads with his malcontented son. His pleas are interrupted by his son's anger, by this speech that's full of slanderous accusations against his father's justice. Religious hypocrites love to talk about justice. They're always grumbling about what they think they deserve, but they have no clue whatsoever about true justice.

But the father lets him vent. He waits patiently until his son, like the fool of Proverbs, gives full vent to his wrath, and when he's expended, his, his shot there, the father responds, and when he responds, he doesn't respond in like manner, does he? It shows him here responding calmly, gently, patiently, tenderly. It's the father, instead of coming in justice, he comes in Christ, first time. Justice is coming in

the second coming. This time he comes in peace. Verse 31, he says son, literally it's, child. His elder son paid him no compliment of an address, but he doesn't return the favor. He actually pays him a compliment. He calls him child, *teknon*, *teknon*.

He could have used the word son, *huios*, but he used the term of endearment here. My child. It's not an insult to the older son. He took it, he didn't take it that way. He didn't take it like he's being condescended to, or talk down to. He took it as a term of endearment. Both these boys are his sons. The father loves them both. He's not playing favorites, so there's no charge of favoritism that can stick with this father.

But he says to the older son. "Son," my child, "you're always with me. And all that is mine is yours." You're always with me means, Son, I'm the reason for all this wealth and prosperity. You've had an abiding, continuous opportunity to build a relationship with me. He's saying. I'm here. I'm always with you. You're always with me. Slaves remain relationally

distant from their masters. Sons draw near. They enjoy intimacy, they enjoy friendship with the father.

They share an unquestioned affection with one another. The elder son, in that home had plenty of time to assess his father's true character to mark all of his goodness to see his acts of kindness, his patient abiding love. Love that's on display in this amazingly gentle confrontation. Accuse the father of injustice; there's a crime. There is a crime punishable by the by the same banishment that he'd hoped upon his brother.

He says, "All that is mine is yours." The father is not just pointing to the division of his estate, which now belongs to the elder son. He's pointing to his life of magnanimous generosity and that's the thought that it actually awakened the prodigal over in a foreign land in the first place, in verse 17, that his father, even the hired servants, have more than enough to eat, to accuse the father of stinginess, really? That's your charge? Not going to make that stick, that's another crime.

Again, punishable by the same kind of banishment that he wished upon his younger brother. So by saying "all that is mine is yours," he means my heart, son, my heart has always been generous. I've always been open, I've always been eager to share, eager to give my bounty of this entire estate is wide open to you. Slaves don't feel the freedom to go into the pantry and dig around, do they? They don't feel the freedom to take what they want. It's sons who enter the pantry or the garage or whatever.

Right? Your sons, go into your pantry, eat you out of house and home. Go into your garage, take all your tools, never return them. I'm not bitter, I'm not bitter. The problem is not a stingy father. The father is generous. The problem is in a son who thinks of himself as a slave, not a son. In fact, he wants to be a slave, not a son. He wants to be, just like the younger son proposed, he wants to be a hired servant, free from this family. The older son is not satisfied in a relationship with his father. He has really has no interest in his father, wants his father stuff.

It's what he wants. But he wants to detach from his father. He wants the stuff abstracted from a relationship with his father, just like his younger brother. He wants his father's goods to celebrate with his friends and notice his friends, not his father. And now just like his younger brother, his patience has run out. He's tired of waiting for his father's death. He's ready to commit patricide.

Pharisees and scribes, just like this. They held in their hands, studied it fastidiously, day by day they held in their hands direct access to God through his word. They recited the *Shema* that we recited this morning, recited that *Shema* daily, but they never followed up on the love of God. They didn't love him with all their heart and soul and might. Salvation, the Kingdom of God, the glory of God, it's all there for the taking. Their hearts are shriveled up. Shrunken by an insatiable greed and envy, blinded by their pride. Fundamentally, they didn't understand justice at all, though they thought they did.

Since their own petty sense of offense was their standard of justice, they had no idea what true justice true

righteousness meant, patient to the end. The father explains justice to his son in verse 32, here's what's just. "It was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead, and is alive. He was lost and is found."

The son's charge, "this your son" the father has turned that around, says "this, your brother." In the ESV's "it was fitting" that's not strong enough at all. It was necessary is what he's saying, it was right. That's the appropriate strength to make the father's point here. To celebrate, it's nothing less than a matter of moral rectitude. It's a matter of righteousness. This is true decency. This is moral necessity. How ironic isn't it? For the older son, whom everybody thought was a good boy, everybody's viewed as the righteous one the decent one, the one who understands propriety, understands decency.

Well, he's the one who needs the lesson in rectitude. He's the one who needs to understand righteousness and decency. His sense of right and wrong is so warped, because it's self-referential. He's oriented to himself, so he's in tune with his

own offenses, his own desires, he's not attuned to God at all. What offends and pleases him. What's fitting or righteous to celebrate. Well, because the father is supremely good and kind, it's a safe bet that whatever the father rejoices in that's fitting to rejoice in as well.

There's a worthwhile reason to rejoice in whatever the father rejoices in. In this case, it's a dead sinner brought to life. It's a lost sinner found. It's a great work here of rescue and resurrection, didn't happen by chance. This isn't like oh how lucky he came to himself. Came back and look, he's restored. Didn't happen by the younger son's power, prowess, wisdom, planning. Raising the dead son, finding the lost son, bringing him home that is all the father, it's all him, it's all his work. It all glorifies the father and that, folks, is worth celebrating.

Well, we've come to the end of the text, haven't we, in verse 32. Well, we're still wondering how does this end? I mean, don't leave us here. Tell, tell us what happened, did the older son repent? Did he confess his profound wickedness that he's

committed in offending his blameless father? Did he fall into his father's embrace? Did he seek and receive his forgiveness? Did he ultimately join the party?

Sadly no. It's not what the older brother did. We know what he did, because when we follow the career of these Pharisees and scribes, we know the outcome, don't we? I couldn't find anyone who put it better than John MacArthur did. He really poignantly captured what happened next. Doctor McArthur says he'd love to write the ending of this story, quote, "that the son seeing his father's love, compassion, and grace, came to his senses about his wicked heart, was humbled, repented, and reconciled." And then Doctor MacArthur goes on this way, "But you know what? I don't get to write the end. Who wrote the end? The Pharisees wrote the end. Here's the end that they wrote. And the older son being outraged at his father, picked up a piece of wood and beat him to death in front of everyone. That's the ending they wrote. That is the cross. And that's what they did just a few months after this. And they congratulated themselves on their righteous act that preserved the honor of Israel and Judaism and true religion and God." End quote.

What about you, my friend? Fellow Christian if your heart has become hard, if you need to, like the older brother, thaw out, and remember the grace of God to you, that found you when you were nothing more than a prodigal covered in filth dressed in filthy rags. Let this story provoke your repentance, restore you back into the father's house, so you can take your seat and honor the father as he ought to be honored.

For any of you who are not yet Christians. Before it's too late, will you repent of your pride? Your self-righteousness, your works. I'm often reminded as a pastor, I'm often informed when someone passes away and I realize every time, man there are no guarantees. Life is really short. Will you before it's too late, repent of your pride, self-righteousness, your works? Will you hear this really gentle, tender appeal of Christ, God in Christ, coming to reconcile you to himself.

Will you receive the gift, his free salvation. While there's breath, there's hope. While there's breath, there's hope. Let's pray. Our Father, we do plead for those who are lost and perishing, whether they are in the condition of the prodigal

or the older brother, or anywhere in between, we pray father that you would show grace even now. We pray that your saving grace would be abundant, drawing sinners to yourself. Pray that sanctifying grace would be plenteous as well as we who are Christians need to hear this over and over and to remember that we owe everything to you. We are the trophies. You're the one who earned everything. You're the one who did it all. To you be all the glory and honor and majesty in power forever and ever, in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.