

The Prodigal's Brother

Franklin Church of Christ
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AM Worship

Introduction:

For the longest time, I have been surprised that the parable of the Prodigal Son did not end with the restoration of the prodigal to his father. Why did Jesus go on to tell about the prodigal's good brother who had always remained with the father? Then I realized that this parable is really not about the prodigal and his return to the father, it is about the brother. The story of the prodigal himself is simply told to set the stage for what Jesus needed to say about the brother. In fact, the story of the prodigal was the third step as Jesus set the stage to tell about this brother. Look again at **Luke 15:1-2**. This story was told to teach the Pharisees and scribes not to grumble that Jesus was eating with tax-gatherers and sinners. But Jesus did not go directly into the story of the prodigal's brother. He first told about a man who lost one sheep out of a hundred. When he found the sheep, what did he and the neighbors do? They rejoiced. Then Jesus told of a woman who lost one silver coin out of ten. What did she and her neighbors do when she found it? They rejoiced. Of course, these things had to do with livelihood. The Pharisees and scribes would certainly be the foremost to rejoice when a lost sheep or a lost coin was found. But a lost person? Oh no, we do not want them to be found, they are sinners. How dare anyone even seek the lost and try to save them. But of course, that was Jesus' mission (**Luke 19:10**). Thus, the true thrust of these three stories is to draw the stark contrast between the Pharisees and scribes perspective and God's perspective. Examine this second half of the prodigal's parable to learn the proper perspective we must maintain.

Discussion:

- I. The proper perspective on our responsibilities.
 - A. The brother is quick to point out all the commandments he has followed in his years of service. And yet, he is not so quick to follow the entreaty and encouragement of his father to rejoice at the return of his brother. The older brother had forgotten that his years of service did not leave him responsibility free just because he did not like his father's approach to some issue.
 - B. The Pharisees had the same problem. They were so caught up in all the lines they kept they believed there were some issues they did not have to follow like mercy (**Matthew 23:23**).
 - C. We must not make this same mistake. We must not forget the commitment we have made to our Father when we submitted in baptism. Remember the statement of Jesus in **Luke 9:62**. Once our hands are on the plow, they need to stay there. We must keep up our responsibilities and our work in the kingdom of Christ. **Hebrews 4:3-11** demonstrates there will be a day when we rest from our labors here. But, no matter how old we are, no matter how tired we are, no matter how busy we are, no matter what happens to us or around us, we must continue to work and fulfill our responsibilities in this life. We do not have the right to say, "This is too much. I will not do this." We must continue our commitment to God, wherever that leads us. We must understand that it leads us to want even the worst of sinners to repent and to accept them and rejoice when they do.
- II. The proper perspective on our service.
 - A. The older brother's mistake was forgetting that all he had came from his father. Just like the prodigal, this older brother was a recipient of the father's grace. By focusing on his time out in the field, the older brother neglected to realize that his time working did not entitle him to all of his father's possessions. He felt a sense of arrogant entitlement.
 - B. The Pharisees and scribes had this problem. They thought their good works made them better than everyone else (**Luke 18:11-12**). They did not recognize their own unworthiness and their own need for God's grace. They seemed to believe that the Father owed them something.
 - C. We must never make this mistake. We must never begin to focus on all that we have done for God. He doesn't need anything from us (**Acts 17:25**). Rather, we are, and have been all our lives, the recipients of His life giving grace.
- III. The proper perspective on our relationships.
 - A. The older brother could not see anything more in this young man who had returned than a person who had spent his father's money running around with whores. He did not see who this

person really was. But the father saw. This was not just some nameless sinner. The prodigal was a son and a brother. He said to the older brother, "This brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found." The father essentially said, "Of course I killed this fatter calf. What do you expect? Our closest kin is back from the dead. Why wouldn't we celebrate?"

- B. The Pharisees had this same problem. They looked at people and all they could see were tax-collectors and sinners. They did not see brethren in the nation of Israel. They could see the value of a lost sheep being found. They could see the value of a lost coin being found. But they could not see the value of one of their brethren being found.
- C. We must not make this mistake. I am sure you have heard people speak of the brotherhood of man. We need to have that sense of kinship with all men and women. We have all descended from the same ultimate parents from Noah back to Adam and Eve. Further, we are not different from any of those around us. We have all chosen to sin and we all need the salvation and grace the Father offers. God loved these people around us so much that He sent Jesus to die for them (**John 3:16; I John 2:2**). We can see this proper perspective in Jesus in **Matthew 9:36**. We need to see how important these souls around us are.
- D. Finally, how much should we rejoice when the person repenting is not only a part of the brotherhood of man but is a part of the brotherhood of Christ who has fallen and now returned?

IV. The proper perspective on our blessings.

- A. Because the older brother had a mistaken perspective regarding his own service, he also had a mistaken perspective on blessings. He deserved blessings and the younger son deserved punishments. How dare the father give this younger, unworthy son, a feast. But the older son neglected two very important realities. First, the blessings belonged to the father and he had the option to bestow them on anyone he wanted, for whatever reason he wanted. Whether the blessing was a feast of the fatted calf or the bestowal of all his property to another, all that both of these sons were around belonged to their father. It was his to do with what he wanted. Second, the father had blessed this older son and was going to bless him further. Perhaps he had never had a feast in his honor, but everything that was the father's was his. He was going to receive his inheritance as well someday. That sounds pretty blessed to me.
- B. The Pharisees had this same problem. Because they thought their service was so great, they thought they were the only ones worthy of receiving attention from a teacher of Jesus' magnitude. They had such a problem with this that they decided Jesus must not be all that great if He would spend time with these sinners instead of with them.
- C. We must never make this mistake. First, we must never forget that everything belongs to God (**Psalm 50:12**) and He can grant blessings to whomever He wishes (**Romans 9:15**). Second, we must count our blessings. **Ephesians 1:3-12**, is a great summary of the wonderful blessings we have in Christ. Further, we must never forget the ultimate blessing that awaits us, reserved for us in heaven (**I Peter 1:4-5**). We are blessed and look forward to more blessing, let us not be envious just because our God is merciful and generous (**Matthew 20:1-15**).

Conclusion:

What kind of perspective do we have? No doubt if someone lost their favorite pet and then found it, we would rejoice with them. Surely, if someone lost their purse or wallet with a hundred dollars in it and then it was returned to them, we would rejoice with them. How much more when our Father has lost one of His children and that child returns to Him, either becoming a Christian or being restored to the faith, how much more ought we to rejoice with God and the angels in heaven? But we will only do so when we maintain the proper perspectives on our responsibilities, service, relationships and blessings. What kind of older brother are you to others in the world?