

Luke 15: 1-2, 25-32 (ESV): The Prodigal and Elder Sons, part 2

Main point: The most valuable thing in the world is being with the Father.

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background/review from Part 1: Jesus is eating with “sinners.”

v. 1-2: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

Questions:

1. *Who are the Pharisees and scribes?*
 - a. The religious rulers, the high class, the “cleaned up,” the “important people”
2. *Who is Jesus eating with?*
 - a. Tax collectors – hated among the Jewish people for working for the Romans and skimming off money from their own people
 - b. “sinners” – outcasts from society, prostitutes, etc.
3. *Why are the “important people upset with Jesus?*
 - a. They think that as an important and revered religious teacher, he should NOT be associating with the “icky” people; it reflects badly on him and his judgment and reputation

In the first part of the story, the part about the Prodigal Son, the son goes off and squanders his inheritance, then comes crawling back home a failure. But what does the father do?

Welcomes him back with open arms and throws a huge party. [review/discuss this part for a few minutes, focusing on the feelings of the father:]

- i. WELCOMES those who come back to him, no matter what condition they’re in
- ii. Constantly on the LOOKOUT for anyone who wants to come back to him
- iii. EMBRACES us when we come to him, no matter what!

So, everyone is really happy in this story ... except one person ...

Focus of the study:

²⁵ “Now [the father’s] older son was in the field, and as [the older son] came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ 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.’ ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was

fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”

Questions:

1. *During the time that the younger son is returning and being welcomed home, where is the elder son? What is he doing?*
 - a. working in the field, fulfilling his duties, taking care of the family estate and business – being a “good son”
2. *What does he hear as he gets near the house? What’s happening? Why?*
 - a. v. 27: music, celebration – in honor of his younger brother, who has come back.
3. *Do you think the elder son is aware of what the younger son did to his father and to the family estate? How do you think he feels about that?*
 - a. Probably angry! Disgusted!
4. *So what is his reaction? Is he excited to join the party?*
 - a. v. 28: No – refuses to go in
5. *What does the father do?*
 - a. Goes out to entreat him to come in
6. *Does this sound familiar? What did the father do when he saw the younger son a long way off?*
 - a. Ran to him and welcomed him. Both times, the father goes to the son.
7. *Does the elder son listen to the father’s entreaty? What happens?*
 - a. v. 39: No – he’s furious. “Look! I have slaved for you all these years, and I’ve never gotten a party ... but when this disrespectful, disgusting *son of yours* [not “my brother”] comes home, he gets a party!”
8. *Do you think he has a point? Why or why not?*
 - a. He’s done the right thing his whole life; feels he has earned/deserves something
9. *What is the father’s reaction?*
 - a. v. 31: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.”
 - i. What is the most important thing about being in the family? Being WITH THE FATHER. It’s not anything you can “earn” by doing all the right things. Simply the presence and love of the father at all times, without interruption; which includes participation in and ownership of every good thing that the father has.
10. *How does he try to persuade the elder son? What is more important to the father than anything else?*
 - a. v. 32: “Your brother was dead and is alive, was lost and is found.”
 - i. What is the ultimate truth about the younger son when he was away from the father’s embrace? *He was dead, lost.*
 - ii. What is always true about being with the father? *We are alive, found.*

The Pharisees are the “good sons” – always following God’s rules, fulfilling their religious duties, and looking down on those who haven’t done what they’ve done. They feel God is “theirs” because they’ve earned that favor and relationship. But Jesus turns this view upside-down

when he tells this story – that even the worst sinners (tax collectors, prostitutes that he eats with) are welcomed home and celebrated, because the father rejoices when they come home.

11. Ask for prayer requests for today.
12. Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
13. End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace