

Luke 15:25

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[0 : 00] Let's now turn to Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 15, and let's read there from verse 25 to the end of the chapter. Luke chapter 15 from verse 25.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. Your brother has come, he replied, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, look, all these years I have been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.

Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him.

My son, the father said, you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again.

[1 : 20] He was lost and is found. And perhaps especially verse 28, the older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

Now very often we call this the parable of the prodigal son. And it's true enough that it is part of a set of three parables our Lord tells that's concerned with something that was lost.

The lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. But there is something extra. In fact, there's probably a great deal extra in this parable compared to the other two. This one is much more detailed.

And one of the details that is extra here is the older brother. And perhaps sometimes we've just considered the older brother as just a kind of extra in the story.

And perhaps not thought enough about what our Lord was teaching us here by referring to this older brother and his part in the story. And so tonight I'd like to finish looking at this parable by looking at what our Lord teaches us concerning ourselves through this older brother.

[2 : 36] Here we come again back to the central issue that our Lord was talking about here. Because our Lord, you remember, was addressing this teaching specifically to a group of people.

That was the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They, remember, were the ones who had been criticizing Jesus for receiving those that they considered to be just outside the pale altogether.

Those that they considered couldn't really worship God properly because they didn't keep all the rules and regulations that they themselves kept. And the rules and regulations which, incidentally, they themselves had formed.

They excluded those people. And they tut-tutted when Jesus welcomed those sinners. Jesus here is addressing a word of rebuke.

And it must be said a word of rather gentle rebuke to those men. In other places, Jesus is perhaps much harder on those men. Perhaps as their obstinacy against him gets harder, so his words to them get harder.

[3 : 57] But here, surely, it is a very gentle rebuke and a very gentle warning that our Lord is giving to them. Because they are the ones who are portrayed in this parable by the older brother.

And see how the father pleads with him and seeks to win him over. And we're left at the end of the parable not knowing what the reaction of the older brother is.

The man is left to make up his own mind. So then Jesus, in this way, seeks to draw the minds of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law to their own inconsistency.

And so he's drawing our attention tonight to the danger that we might be as inconsistent as the Pharisees were.

We've got to take this very much to ourselves and take also the words of Scripture to ourselves. Let him who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

[5 : 09] The Pharisees preeminently thought that they stood, that they stood right with God. They didn't seem to entertain any doubts about it.

Yet Jesus consistently shows that their attitude was completely wrong. They thought that they stood. But in fact, they had fallen very far away from the grace of God.

First then, we look this evening at the older son's outward circumstances. In other words, the way that he appeared to people.

And that outward picture of him is a very favorable one. First of all, he had stayed with his father.

The other son, the younger brother, was the one who had taken his share of the property and gone away and wasted that part, that proportion of his father's inheritance.

But the older brother was the one who had stayed with his father. He had not rebelled against his father and his father's principles, his father's standards, his father's way of doing things.

[6 : 21] He had stayed with him. He had supported his father. He had remained as part of his father's family. And he had enjoyed his part of the father's inheritance.

But also, secondly, we see that he had worked hard. In verse 25, we even notice this. Meanwhile, the older son was in the field.

When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. In other words, he had been out about his business. He had been out at the work of the farm or whatever the business was. He had been working away.

And so his words that he speaks rather scathingly to his father, they're probably based on what is a true picture of what he was like as a person.

Later on, he says in verse 29, look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Now, of course, there's exaggeration here that we must allow for in the way he's speaking.

[7 : 26] He's angry and so on. But it's based upon fact, surely. He could only say this and get away with it if, in fact, there was a basis for truth in it. And that basis was that he was hardworking.

That he had worked away. He had served his father for all those years. And he had obeyed his father's order. In other words, what we would have outwardly to people, say, who lived roundabout was a picture of a good, hardworking son.

You can just imagine how people might have talked in that area. They might have said, well, isn't that a marvelous, fine son that that man has got? Compared to the other brother, the one who went away and made a mess of his life.

And what a great comfort it must be to the father to have a son like that who has stayed at home and who's worked hard, who's supported him, and who always obeys. You can just imagine the picture that people had of this man.

Well, that was the outward appearance. And, you know, the outward appearance, of course, as we know, is often very deceptive. That, you see, was the outward appearance as far as the Pharisees were concerned.

[8 : 39] The Pharisees, and we tend perhaps to forget this because we have inherited our Lord's view of them.

The Pharisees were the most upright people who were living at that time in which our Lord lived.

And, you see, it's only by comparison with the righteousness of Christ that they seemed so terrible.

To the people living at that time, they were the very epitome of righteousness. They were the most upright and outstanding members of the community.

They were scrupulous in all their dealings. Scrupulous down to the very paying of the tenth part of the herbs of their back garden.

Scrupulous in every matter of religion and morality as they understood it. Now, we tend perhaps so often to forget that.

[9 : 39] And we tend perhaps to concentrate on the fact that Jesus called them hypocrites. But, you know, if you and I had been there, we wouldn't really have been able to detect their hypocrisy probably most of the time.

It was only to the eye of Jesus that that hypocrisy was so evident. As he could see not just the outward appearance, but he could see what was in the heart of man.

I say that because we tend perhaps just to write off the scribes and the Pharisees as just belonging to a kind of class of their own.

And we marvel that such people could have rejected Jesus. But, you see, those people are there as a standing warning to ourselves.

Because we can perhaps fall very much into the pattern of the scribes and the Pharisees. We can be all right as far as outward appearance is concerned.

[10 : 42] We can be very punctual in all the details of our church practice, of the practice of our religion.

We can give the outward appearance of being right with God. We can give the outward appearance of being right in our attitude of worship.

And all the time, inwardly, there is something very different going on. And that inward difference may very often at times show itself, as it showed itself in the case of the scribes and the Pharisees. Especially when they were brought into confrontation with Jesus. And that's really where they were shown up to be what they truly were. And isn't it true also that it's only when we come face to face with the claims of Jesus Christ.

Face to face with his words. Face to face with his character and his person. As revealed in scripture. That's the place that we're shown up for what we are.

[11 : 59] We can perhaps give a very good impression of ourselves to other people. Perhaps we in the free church can, as a church, give a very good impression of ourselves as a church to those outside.

And I know there are many people, perhaps a surprising number of people, who respect the free church as a church that stands for standards and principles.

Stands for orthodoxy. And all these things are true. All these things are right. And we should be glad that that's so. But you know, although we may be able to have that impression with other people, if that heart is not right, if it is only an outward appearance, God sees what is in our heart. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. We may be very much like the older brother here.

We may be those who have stayed. Who have stayed orthodox. Who have stayed true. Who have stayed loyal. We may be those even who have worked hard at supporting the truth.

[13 : 20] As we see it. And yet we too may fall into the same kind of errors and sins. That the older brother fell into. Let's look then at the inner attitudes of the older brother as they're brought out here by Jesus.

You see, up until this time, up until this crisis in his life, the older brother gave a great impression of himself. People round about would have had a high opinion of him.

But now a crisis comes. A crisis situation. Something rubs him up the wrong way. And suddenly he's displayed for what he is.

Just as the scribes and Pharisees, they were okay until the crisis came. The son of God came. And a reaction was demanded from them.

And they were rubbed up the wrong way. And they let out what was really inside. And it wasn't what had appeared to be there.

[14 : 26] The inner attitudes then of the older brother. First of all, we see his attitude to himself. In verse 29. But he answered his father, Look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.

Here we see, although we've noticed already this, it probably got a basis in truth. Yet it displays a certain attitude about himself, doesn't it?

He was proud of what he had done. He had this pride in the kind of person he was. And it was that kind of pride that demanded recognition.

It demanded reward. And I wonder how often we have that kind of, that same kind of attitude. Just as the scribes and Pharisees had.

You see, that was the whole basis of their practice of religion. They had this idea that if they carried out the details of what they understood to be the law of God, in its minutest detail, then they demanded God's favor.

[15 : 39] God had to be pleased with them. And they were proud of their achievements in keeping the law of God. That can very easily be true of us.

Although we may hold to the doctrine of justification by faith with the best of them, yet when it comes down to the secrecy of our own hearts, is it not true that sometimes we feel God ought to be better to us than what he seems to be?

We have a certain pride in what may be regarded to be our achievements, our orthodoxy, our faithfulness, our loyalty to the truth. And we feel, why isn't God seeming to be more favorably disposed to us than what he is?

And there's this sneaking feeling perhaps in our hearts that it's not exactly fair. When God seems to be blessing others, why is he not blessing us? It's as if we feel that our obedience, our righteousness is crying out for a reward.

And we've suddenly let go of the very central issue of our faith, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. [17:05] So in his attitude to himself, he had this pride. He boasted about what he had done. But then secondly, we see his attitude, his inner attitude to his father.

Again in verse 29, Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. Now here again, you see the truth will out.

All those years he had served his father and he gave this outward appearance of being a good son. And yet in his heart, gnawing away all the time had been this complaint against his father, this bitterness, this feeling that his father wasn't really rewarding him as he ought to be rewarded. This feeling that his father didn't think really highly of Aminah, who didn't give him all the perks that he so required.

Perhaps there was that same kind of attitude coming out in the scribes and Pharisees when they saw those tax collectors and sinners, perhaps some of those prostitutes and harlots that are referred to here in this story and are referred to elsewhere by our Lord Jesus.

[18:31] They saw these people coming and they suddenly felt a resentment. If Jesus was whom he claimed to be, how could he be accepting and receiving such people?

And in their resentment, you see, they rejected him. He couldn't possibly be whom he claimed to be. This man welcomes sinners. And in doing so, although perhaps they didn't realize it, they were complaining against God, the God that they claimed to worship and serve.

They were rejecting his way of working and his way of dealing. Now, can that also be true of us? Can we take this stage further and say that sometimes we, in our hearts, maybe if not outwardly, complain against God and against his dealings with us?

This feeling that we outlined to begin with, this feeling that perhaps we deserve more than what we're getting, does it spill over into this holding a grudge even against God that he's not giving us all we deserve?

We're not seeing the blessing, the prosperity as a church that we deserve. Thinking of our church as a whole, Free Church of Scotland, Orthodox, maybe having a great pride in our Orthodoxy.

[20:14] And yet, our church is not growing. There doesn't seem to be any great blessing upon our church. Also, thanks be to God, there are those up and down the land who are being saved and coming to a knowledge of the truth.

But yet, there doesn't seem to be this sort of great, obvious blessing. Are we harboring some kind of wrong attitude against God? Feeling that it's his fault that nothing is happening and not ours.

So we've seen his inner attitude to himself and to his father. But then, and here we see it all most clearly, don't we, his attitude to his brother. That's where it all really is crystallized.

This begins in verse 28. The older brother became angry and refused to go in. There he was, he had a hard day in the fields, he's coming home, wanting a perhaps, a hot bath and a good meal. And suddenly, he hears all this noise coming from the house, sound of music, dancing. There he is, tired, he's been slugging his guts out all day.

[21:32] And here are people enjoying themselves. And when he asks the reason, it makes it even worse. When he asks, why all this noise? Why all this celebration?

The servant says, your brother has come, your father's killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound. Now, if we read his mentality correctly, that was really the thing that was the last straw.

All of these feelings that we've been outlining were there inside him already. They had maybe not been given expression to before, but they were all there. And now suddenly, this is the last straw and the floodgates open.

And he becomes angry and refuses to go in. And then it all boils out in what he has to say to his father about it.

But the first thing is just simply this. He angrily refuses to see his brother. He just doesn't want anything to do with him. He has this resentment.

[22 : 38] It's perhaps a resentment that was really building up against his father. But now, it is a particular cause. It spills out against his younger brother. And in verse 30, we notice something else about this attitude to his brother.

He wouldn't even call him his brother. He wouldn't even own him as his brother. Compare that to the attitude of the father we were thinking about this morning. The father welcomed that younger son back as his own son.

He put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. He welcomed him back as the honored son in his family. But this older brother, he wouldn't even call him his brother.

In verse 30, we see, when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitute, he wouldn't even call him his brother. He refers to him simply as his father's son, your son.

Don't say he has anything to do with me. Don't say he's my brother. He's your son. And then also in verse 30, we see something else.

[23 : 47] It's difficult to know whether it's whether it's an exaggeration of the sins of the younger brother, whether it's the older brother's lurid imagination trying to make the worst of the situation, or whether it's just calling attention to the worst of his brother's excesses, we don't know.

But look at what he says. When this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him. Now, we didn't read anything else so far about the younger son squandering his father's living with prostitutes.

We're not told that earlier in the story. Whether this is the older brother trying to make it appear at his very worst, or whether it is that he's just emphasizing the worst possible thing he can pick on that he's heard about his younger brother, we don't know.

But at any rate, it displays his inner attitude to his younger brother. How different from the attitude of the father, the attitude that closed the book upon the path and said, I'm not going to hear anything more about that path.

It's finished. He was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found. That's all the father had to say about it. And he just welcomed him back.

[25 : 07] And he wouldn't even hear his son saying to him, just make me one of your hired servants. No. He called a servant and said, get a robe and put it on him.

Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. But here, the older brother, he will not forgive. He will not forget the past. Rather, he will emphasize it and exacerbate it.

Now I wonder, can this attitude also sometimes be found in ourselves? It was found with the Pharisees, teachers of the law.

When they saw those tax collectors, sinners, harlots, coming back, coming to Jesus, listening to the word of God being proclaimed, hungry for that word of grace and forgiveness, all they had to say was, this man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

You see, they didn't want to know that kind of gospel, that kind of grace. Now, we would have to say for ourselves, that is the gospel that we love.

[26 : 26] That is the gospel that we love to be proclaimed. That's the gospel that we want to be preached in our church, that this man welcomes sinners. But then, I wonder, are we always consistent about this?

Are we as consistent about it as we ought to be? Do we rejoice that Christ that Christ is preached wherever he is preached, however he is preached, as Paul did?

He says, but Christ is preached and therein I rejoice. People had been trying to preach Christ out of wrong motives, trying to do this or to do that in a wrong way, perhaps trying to get at Paul, perhaps trying to make emphasis that would play down Paul's authority and so on.

But Paul says, whatever Christ is preached and therein I rejoice. In our attitude to other churches, perhaps other churches that are growing, that do seem to be being blessed by people being converted, by the church being built up, we may not agree with them a hundred percent on all points of doctrine or church practice.

maybe many things that we might feel uneasy about, maybe many things that we may be right to feel uneasy about, but do we rejoice in this that Christ is preached?

[27 : 54] Do we rejoice in this that sinners are saved? Now surely if our attitude is right, we ought to so rejoice. That surely must be at the forefront of our life and of our thinking, that wherever sinners are saved, wherever sinners come to own the Lord Jesus Christ as their savior.

Wherever the lost is found, whenever the dead are alive again, surely that's cause for rejoicing. Then what about, again, thinking about ourselves as a church, as a congregation, if we really had the right attitude, the sort of antithesis of the older brother, the attitude of the father, wouldn't we be doing everything in our power to see that the lost are found and that the dead are alive again? Haven't we to give much more thought than what we may have been doing to seeking the lost in bringing back those who have strayed?

Those, perhaps, within our own fellowship in the past who have wandered away for one reason or another? Those, perhaps, who are just friends, acquaintances, those around us in the city of Aberdeen?

Or are they all to us, just like the people of Nineveh were to Jonah? Who just looked upon it all as just a way of seeing his pride in himself as a prophet being fulfilled by the city being destroyed?

[29 : 44] And was so angry with God when he knew that God wasn't going to do it when the people repented and God forgave the sin of the city?

What kind of attitude do we have to this city and to the people we know? Is it the attitude of the older brother of Jonah or is it the attitude of the father in this parable?

Is it the attitude of our heavenly father and our Lord Jesus Christ? That attitude that would draw them and would encourage them and would seek to do everything in our power to make the good news of Jesus Christ known to them?

Well finally let's then just look at the father's attitude. Now we've looked at the father's attitude to the lost son to the prodigal son but you see there's also the father's attitude to the older brother and this comes out towards the end of the chapter here.

But first we have to notice something right from the beginning of the parable. In verse 12 the younger one said to this father father give me my share of the estate.

[31 : 11] Now we perhaps tend to skip over the next bit because we think the younger son got his share and off he goes. but read what it says so he divided his property between them.

The father said okay you want your share of the property but fair is fair. You're wanting your share of the inheritance now. You don't want to wait until I'm dead.

So fair is fair the older son must get his share as well. And he divided his property between them. It's as if from that moment the father was saying okay it's as if I've died I've divided the property up between you.

He had given the older brother his share of the property. He had given him his inheritance. And now don't you see how all the older brother's attitude is so phony and so wrong.

because he wasn't the poor little servant boy obeying his father all the time. He was the one who had the inheritance and the father says this to him all that I have is yours.

[32 : 28] All that I have is yours and that is true. That's exactly a description of the true situation. Again this was exactly applicable to the Pharisees and teachers of the law.

They were those who had a great inheritance. They had the inheritance of Abraham of Moses of David of all the prophets of God.

They had the inheritance of the scriptures. The law and the prophets and the psalms and all the writings of the Old Testament they had that great inheritance.

They had all that was necessary for their salvation. They had all that was necessary for them being the ones who would herald the kingdom of God and welcome the son of God and welcome the sinners who were returning to the son of God yet they did not do so.

The father the heavenly father has given to us our share of his property to put it in terms of the pattern. He has given to us the greatest gift of all.

[33 : 52] He has given to us the Lord Jesus Christ and he has given to us his own dear son in a particular inheritance in which it has come to us and we have a glorious inheritance of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ coming to us in this land coming to us through the faithfulness of men and women down over the centuries who have lived and who have fought and who have died to bring us the truth and to make sure that the truth was kept alive in this land.

We have that glorious share of our inheritance. The father has given us this and the great question we have to be asking ourselves constantly is how are we using this inheritance?

Are we using it as God desires us to use it? Or are we in a different way perhaps from the prodigal son just frittering it away?

See the older son had his riches he had the whole share the bigger share probably being the older brother of his father's property yet did he enjoy it?

Did he use it? Did he benefit from it? No. He still had the attitude of being someone who was just a servant someone who was just a slave slaving away in his father's house bearing resentment against his father resentment against his older brother?

[35 : 25] Do we perhaps have something of the same kind of niggardly attitude? Are we aware of the riches that are ours in Christ Jesus? Are we aware of the riches of our inheritance that we have in this land and in this day of gospel privileges?

Are we just a bit like the older brother feeling that we're so poor and we're so got at and we've got so many grudges and so many difficulties forgetting that all that I have God says is yours.

But then also we see about this son the older son that his father's attitude to him expresses this truth he considered that his relationship relationship with his older son was secure.

In verse 31 my son father said you are always with me and everything I have is yours. Not only was everything that he had his but also he was always with him.

It's as if the father is stressing to him look all the doubt all the problem all the wrong feeling is on your side not on mine. All that I have is yours.

[36 : 53] What more can I give you? And you are always with me. Your relationship with me is secure. it's not going to be broken from my side. If it's to be broken it's in your own heart it's in your own attitude.

What a marvelous truth that is. That God speaks to his people. Not only all that I have is yours but you are always with me.

That's the word that he speaks to every person who is his. Lord Jesus said no one is able to pluck us out of his hand. That is the great gift of the salvation of our God.

That also is ours in Christ Jesus. And notice through all of this through what we've been looking at here of the father's dealings with his son and his father's words to him.

Look at it all that the father comes out and he pleads with him. In verse 28 the older brother became angry and refused to go in.

[38 : 05] But then we see that the father just as in his dealings with his younger son he went to him. He ran to meet him. So here he comes out and pleads with him.

You see the same loving attitude on the part of the father. We can't really understand how the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. How they didn't just break down at such gracious words of our Lord.

That God was coming out and pleading with them to repent, to change their attitude, to turn around and to just see the folly of their ways and to see the great love of the Lord Jesus Christ and to see the good that was being done there in front of their eyes by those sinners coming and hearing Jesus and soaking up his grace and his love as those who are thirsty and hungry and empty.

He comes out and he pleads with the older brother. Not only does he come out to him, not only does he plead with him, but as we've been seeing, he reasons with him.

My son, the father said, you are always with me and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost in his family.

[39 : 37] He didn't just come out and sort of command his son to come in, nor did he just address a few words to him or a rebuke to him.

His pleading with him was reasoning. He was giving reasons for all that had happened. He was showing how right it was that they were celebrating and being glad.

And surely this is the great thing about our heavenly father, that not just a bare command is addressed to us to repent, not even a bare invitation, but the scriptures are full of the sweet reasonings of the Holy Spirit seeking to draw us, seeking to touch us, seeking to move us, seeking to turn us away from our foolishness.

You see, all the reasons, all the right reasons were there for what was happening. It was right that they should rejoice. It was right that they should be married. It was right that they should celebrate.

The wrong was not in the celebration. the wrong was in the heart of the older brother. And as I mentioned at the beginning, we're left here at the end of the parable with those words of the father.

[41 : 02] And we're not told how the older brother reacts. that surely is one of the most powerful devices that our Lord uses in his teaching.

But sometimes it is left in doubt. It is left in question as to how someone reacts. And so if we've been following through his teaching properly and we've placed ourselves in the position of this person, we're left with the question ourselves, personally.

how do we react? What is our reaction to those gracious words of the father? That's what we've got to ask ourselves to tonight.

How do we react to those gracious words of our heavenly father? father? You are always with me. Everything I have is yours.

But we have to celebrate and be glad. Because this brother of yours, notice this brother of yours, there he is seeking to reconcile not just the older brother to himself, but seeking to reconcile brother with brother.

[42 : 13] This brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And that is the prayer, that is the pleading of our heavenly father tonight also.

That not only would we be truly reconciled with our heavenly father, if there is anything in our hearts that is wrong, anything that we are holding against him, anything that we are resenting, but that also we would be reconciled with our brothers and sisters in Christ, those who have been welcomed and received by God, that we would consider them our brothers and we would bear no resentment, no grudge against them.

God may be blessing them. It may seem to be in a greater way than which he is blessing us at the moment, although that may be only the appearance of things. There should be no grudge, there should be no bitterness, there should only be rejoicing in our part, that God is blessing them.

And there should be only compassion and there should only be a feeling of empathy and sympathy if our brother or sister in Christ is suffering hardship and not like the older brother rejoicing when his younger brother was in such trouble and casting this up against him, his trouble and his sin once he had returned.

Surely our attitude ought to be one of being reconciled with each other to that extent that we are seeking to have the same attitude to each other as God has to us.

[43 : 50] Let us pray.