

Everything I have is yours  
Luke 15:25-32

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In this masterpiece of a story, Jesus communicates several lessons. But I believe the main point of this story (and parables usually only have one main point and to read too much into them can be dangerous) and this main point is to show us what God is really like; That He not some impersonal tyrant who is too busy to care about you, but He is a loving Heavenly Father who has numbered the hairs on your head. He will forgive you when you return to Him. We also learn that if you wander away from God, you can repent and return to His open arms.

Let's review the first part of the parable.

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- When he came to his senses, he confessed to God that he had sinned and he headed home.
- He wasn't sure how his father would receive him, so he was prepared to take the job of a servant. But when his father saw him, the father ran to meet him.
- The Father embraced his son, showered him with kisses, dressed his son in a new robe, gave him a family ring, put shoes on his feet and killed the fattened calf. And the party began.

It would be nice if the story ended there, and had the sinners and tax collectors been the only ones listening it might have, but Jesus had a message for the religious Pharisees who were also part of the crowd who were listening to the story.

Remember how the second part of the story went – let's read it as recorded in the bible.

*<sup>25</sup>"Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, <sup>26</sup>and he*

*asked one of the servants what was going on. <sup>27</sup>"Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.'*

*<sup>28</sup>"The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, <sup>29</sup>but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. <sup>30</sup>Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!'*

*<sup>31</sup>"His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup>We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!'"*

There are a couple of famous pieces of art that portray this parable. The most famous is the one done by Rembrandt, I like the style but there is another one by the 17th Century Spanish artist, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, that tells more of the story.

You can immediately see the father and the prodigal son in the picture. The prodigal son is filthy and his clothes are in tatters. His hands are clasped in prayer and he has a hopeful look on his face as if he is still wondering, "Will he take me back?" The Father is leaning over and embracing the son, oblivious to his dirt and no doubt smell. Not sure where the dog comes into it, maybe covers the cuteness factor.

Behind the father, two servants are bringing a tray with a fine robe and sandals for the boy. Another servant is holding a ring. To the left a young servant is leading the fattened calf, and a workman has an axe ready to kill the calf or build the fire so the feast can begin.

It's party time and everyone is happy—except for one face. There to the right in the shadows Murillo painted the older brother. I am not very good at art but people say there is a resemblance between the two sons, and if you look closely you see Murillo painted a smirk on his face. In his eyes and on his lips you can see the resentment and sarcasm. The younger son is on his knees looking up at the father, but the older brother is looking on the whole scene with indignation and anger.

The older brother is the Pouting Prodigal. As we learnt last week it seems he has a dysfunctional relationship with his father and with his brother. The older brother represents the Pharisees who were one of the groups of listeners, who represent many religious people today who haven't sinned against God by running off and going wild. In fact, for these religious types life is so tame and boring that "wild living" isn't part of their vocab. Their spiritual calling is to keep a pew warm and to ensure everyone one is doing things the right way.

Remember what we mentioned were the signs and symptom of being elder brotherish, at least in part?

Elder brothers are often consumed by **Surprising Anger**.

"I have done the right thing - God should do the right thing by me." "I attend church regularly, I pray daily, I give my tithe, I'm kind to people, I avoid doing the wrong thing, or being with the wrong people – God you owe me" and when life doesn't turn out like we would like it, we get angry and we blame God.

Elder brothers live lives of **Joyless Conformity**. The older brother tends to live in his Father's house with the attitude of a slave not a son. He does what is required in order to get what he wants. He lives for the Father's things not for the Father's love.

Elder brothers have **Compassion Deficiency**. The older brother didn't care about his lost brother. This lack of compassion shows up in churches when we resist God's command to share the gospel with others – the lost. We make church about us, our needs, our comfort, our preferences, our songs, our traditions – rather than the church being a community of transforming power in the world.

Elder brothers demonstrate **Judgmental Attitudes**. The older brother struggles with the concept of grace – they are big on rules. The spirit of the older brother lives in us as we hold on to grudges, we refuse to forgive, as we judge people by the way they look, the way they speak, the colour of their skin, their sexuality, their religion....

The older brother was insulted because he really thought he deserved better than the younger son. He thought he deserved a fattened calf, or at least a billy goat. He was offended because he thought his brother deserved less. After all,

he had been serving in the fields and he had kept all the rules while the brother was off living it up. It just wasn't right!

In Matthew 20 Jesus tells a parable about the nature of God's grace. It's a story of a master who sends workers to work in his vineyard. He agrees to pay them a dollar for a full day's work, so they start working at sunrise. At 9 a.m. he sends some other workers to help, and then at noon and at 3:00 he sends some more. Then, just before quitting time, at 5:00 he sends some new workers to help, too. Finally, the whistle blows and it's time for the workers to receive their wages. We'll pick up with the story in Jesus' own words:

"Call the workers and pay them their wages. Start with the last hired and go on to the first. Those hired at five o'clock came up and were each given a dollar. When those who were hired first saw that, they assumed they would get far more. But they got the same, each of them one dollar. Taking the dollar, they groused angrily to the manager, 'These last workers put in only one easy hour, and you just made them equal to us, who slaved all day under a scorching sun.' [sound like the older brother?] He replied to the one speaking for the rest, 'Friend, I haven't been unfair. We agreed on the wage of a dollar, didn't we? So take it and go. I decided to give to the ones who came last the same as you. Can't I do what I want with my money? Are you going to get stingy because I am so generous?'" (Matthew 20:9-15 The Message)

To understand this parable you must remember the audience to whom Jesus was speaking. Just like when telling the prodigal son story, there were tax collectors and sinners and there were also Pharisees. The Pharisees were trying to earn God's acceptance, and Jesus was teaching them they needed God's grace too, just as much as the sinners and tax collectors.

For some of us, we can be like the older brother. We've known the Lord for years, and we can sometimes have a proud sense of our own religious righteousness. We have forgotten what it was like to be lost, and we think we deserve God's blessings but God's grace is available to anyone who comes to Him in repentance. Remember, the thief on the cross? He was saved just minutes before he died, but yet Jesus promised him he would be in paradise with Him—that's grace.

#### **God's Message To The Pharisee In The Pew**

Sadly, churches are full of Pharisees in the pews. Are you one? It's easy to think

about other people being Pharisees, but what about me? Let's pause right now and ask God to examine your heart to see if there is even a shred of a Pharisaic spirit? Will you pray the words of Psalm 139:23-24? "Search me, O God, and know my heart; See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

If you are an older brother type, a Pharisee in the pew, God has some tender words to say to you. In the parable, the father didn't rush out and say to the older brother, "Get yourself in that house right now or you will lose your part of the inheritance." No, he tenderly pleaded with him. There are three things God is saying to the Pharisee in the pew.

1. **"I treasure our relationship more than your work."**

The father said, "You have always been with me." He was saying, "It's not your work that I cherish—it's you." Just knowing you were here at home with me gave me a great sense of enjoyment. Jesus is saying to the Pharisees - God doesn't want your service as much as He wants you.

Remember the story of Mary and Martha? Martha was slaving away in the kitchen while Mary was sitting at Jesus' feet. She became angry at Mary (it's the older sister syndrome). Jesus said Mary had chosen the one thing that will never be taken from her—a relationship with Him. Some Christians work so hard at doing the right thing they have substituted keep rules for relationship.

2. **"You have access to all of my resources."**

Next, the father said, "All that I have is yours." He was saying, "If you wanted a billy goat feast, I would have been glad to give you one, but you never asked." To Christians today, He says, "You are my heir. You are a joint heir with my Son, Jesus. All that I have is yours."

Sometimes older brother Christians look around and are jealous because it seems other Christians are receiving more blessings than they have. Sadly, so many Christians think they have to earn those blessings- work harder, sacrifice more, keep more rules—but it's all part of God's grace.

It's like the fellow decades ago who scrimped and saved enough money to purchase a ticket on a ship sailing from England to America. On the voyage, he looked through the windows into the dining room and saw the

sumptuous meals that were being enjoyed, and then he would return to his little room and eat the crackers and cheese he had brought. The crackers soon ran out and the cheese got mouldy, and the guy grew hungrier and hungrier. A day before arriving in America, he was almost fainting from hunger. He finally swallowed his pride and approached a steward and begged for some leftover food. He would be willing to wash dishes or perform any work for food. The steward asked for the man's ticket. Upon examining it he said, "Sir, all the food we have been serving was included in the price." All the time, he could have been feasting while he was starving.

The same is true of the Christian life. You didn't buy your ticket, Jesus paid it all. But everything you need in the Christian life was included, and if you are missing out, it's simply because you haven't claimed what is yours in Christ. All the power, all the joy, all the peace, all the security, all the love, all the patience you need is available to you.

3. **"It's my party, so come join me!"**

"We should be glad and celebrate" verse 32.

What the father was actually saying was "Son, you and I HAVE to celebrate." He was saying, "It's not your younger brother's party, it's MY party. I'm the one who's celebrating because my son was dead and he's alive. So you MUST join me, not for your brother's sake, but for MY sake!" The party was not for the "reckless son" it was for the "recklessly loving father".

How do we know that? That's the point of the three parables in Luke 15—celebration over lost things being found.

- The Shepherd found the lamb—and celebrated.
- The woman found the coin—and celebrated.
- The father forgave his wayward son—and celebrated.

To every pouting prodigal, elder brother, God says, "Come on; join me in the celebration, because there is joy in the presence of angels over one who repents!"

Now, how does the story end? We're left hanging. Does the older brother stomp off into the fields and continue to nurse his bitterness? Or does he

uncross his arms and allow his dad to put his arms around his shoulders and walk into the house together and celebrate the younger brother's return?

I think Jesus left it open-ended on purpose. It's up to us as listeners. What will you do? The door is open and the Father says, leave your attitude at the door and come on in—enjoy the party. Can you hear the music? Can you smell the feast? Come on in.

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