

November 23rd, 2008 “The Last Year of the Life of Christ, Part 25”

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Luke 15:29-30

29 So [the older son] answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.

30 But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

Jesus is in the home stretch of His preaching ministry and, as He comes to the close of His earthly life, the major theme of His teaching is His most important one, that being, our eligibility for entrance into Heaven. In the last few lessons, I have tried to make the point that it is essential for us to recognize that we are all sinners, that none of us is worthy to enter heaven, and that we are saved, not by our own righteousness, but by the grace gift of the sacrifice, of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, which pays the penalty that we owe for and atones for the sins that we have committed. **Romans 6:23** explains:

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In our last lesson, we studied the parable that started in **Luke 15:11**:

11 Then [Jesus] said: “A certain man had two sons.

In that lesson, we discussed the activities of the younger of the two brothers, who chafed under the supervision of his father and decided to make his own living. In order to do so, however, he asked his father to bankroll his operation. The younger brother’s plan did not work out so well, as **Luke 15:12-14** records:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood.

13 And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

14 But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.

The younger brother left his father’s house with a great deal of money, but he lacked the discipline required to build a business and support himself, choosing rather to spend his money on pleasures. Having done so, he found himself in need of food. His solution to his problem was

to get a job, but the job available was not a very good one, as **Luke 15:15-17** records:

15 Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16 And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

Hunger forced the younger son to look at the facts. Understanding and living by facts and principles is the key to maturity, and the younger son was enrolled in a course in maturity from the college of hard knocks. When we find ourselves in that school and we are beginning to fail the course, if we are wise, we will look for help with our homework. Jesus tells us, in **Matthew 11:28-30**:

28 Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

Back home, in the father’s house, is the promise of rest and a light burden, while in the far country is hard work and hunger. At home, the son is the master of all he surveys; in the far country, he has to feed pigs and eat their food. The choice between the two lifestyles is not difficult but the question that the son has may be: after wasting the father’s substance, how can the son be confident that his father will receive him again?

Well, the son can’t be certain, but listen to the perspective of a man who has come to himself.

The son says to himself, ‘A stranger in the far country, whom I did not know, took me in as a servant. Ought I not reasonably expect my father to take me in as graciously as a stranger did?’

That’s good thinking.

The son continues, ‘I’m starving here in the far country. Even if my father is angry and refuses to take me back, I have nothing here, so I have nothing to lose by going back home. My chances of getting a good job from my father is much better than my chance of getting a better job than this from the stranger in the far country.’

This reality should be intuitively obvious to anyone that looks at it. The intelligent decision would be to give up the far country and go home. So the son decides, in **Luke 15:18-20**:

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,

19 and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” ‘

20 “And he arose and came to his father.

A good father is one that has the proper perspective about his son. A good father understands that his son is going to act immaturely, make poor decisions and fail in some things. A good father understands that which the Apostle Paul tells us, in **Romans 3:23**:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

The “all” that have sinned, as recorded in **Romans 3:23**, includes good fathers, and good fathers recognize that although they may not have done the specific dumb thing that their sons did, that sometime during their lives they have done something that was dumb and were forgiven for it, so they have to give their sons some slack.

Good fathers take the long view and view their sons’ immaturity objectively, meaning that they don’t get their egos wrapped up in the successes of their sons, and don’t become hostile or overly disappointed over the failings of their sons. Think about it. Being perfect is the only way that we can meet God’s standards and please Him. If God became hostile over our failings, we would all be condemned.

The importance of that which the Apostle Paul says in **Romans 12:3** cannot be stressed too highly:

3 For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

In the first part of this verse, “**through the grace given to me**”, Paul acknowledges that his great learning and his great thinking, through which he preaches, is not of himself, but is a grace gift from God. And, just as Paul’s ability is a function of God’s grace to him, our abilities are a function of God’s grace to us. It is important that we not forget the salient fact that that which we have, we have received from God. This being true, we have nothing of which to think highly of ourselves.

I started preparing this sermon earlier in the week than usual, because my wife and I planned to go out dancing on Saturday night. I could, however, have neglected to write a sermon for today. In my library, I have books of sermons on virtually every Biblical topic. I could have easily found one, copied it to my computer and preached it this morning. As a matter of fact, since the bulk of my library is electronic, I would not even have had to copy the sermon. I could have read it off the screen verbatim from the book that I chose.

Suppose, when I finished the sermon, you came up to compliment me on the great sermon that I prepared for this morning. To accept your accolade would be the dictionary definition of my thinking more highly of me than I ought to think, because I would be taking credit for preparing something that someone else prepared.

Paul tells us to think soberly about ourselves. Paul means for us to recognize that we are foolish, ignorant and weak creatures through whom God chooses to get His work done, and that God supplies the wisdom, the knowledge and the strength by which we do that which he commands us.

The younger brother did not do well in the far country. He wasted the money that his father gave him and ended up almost starving while working in a dead end job. The advantage of his excellent upbringing did him no good in the far country, but he did have the intelligence to realize that his best course of action was to go home to his father and beg for another chance. So he went home. **Luke 15:20-24** records:

20 “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.

23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry;

24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

The father thought back to his own young, impetuous days. There is no telling what kind of shenanigans in which the father had been involved when he was young, but the father remembered that at least one time, after performing some misdeed, someone had given him another chance. His son was repentant, confessing his sin and begging for a chance, not to be a son again, but to just be a servant. So, the father was grateful for the opportunity to extend the blessing of another chance to his son. After all, his son could have died in the far country. The father recognized, from his sons’ humility, that his son had learned his lesson.

However, **Luke 15:11** records:

11 Then [Jesus] said: “A certain man had two sons.

There is another son with which to be reckoned. **Luke 15:25-27** says:

25 “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

26 So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’

What was the reaction of the older son to the festivities that his father was having because of the return of his brother? The ‘a’ portion of **Luke 15:28** records:

28 “But he was angry and would not go in.

People make decisions in one of two ways, those being, emotionally or intellectually. Emotional decision making is the form of decision making with which we are the most familiar. Our emotions, meaning our feelings, are developed to some degree when we are born, but the synapses in our brains that allow us to think intellectually are not, as they connect gradually as we mature. The reason that the 2AM feeding is a cliché among parents is the fact that babies do not have the intellectual capacity and personal restraint to take the tiredness of their parents into account when they are hungry. When the baby cries at 2AM, he is not starving, he is simply hungry. But all that the baby knows is that he wants what he wants when he wants it, and if he doesn’t get it, he needs to make a fuss. Infants and toddlers learn quickly that the easiest way to control their environment is to express negative emotions such as anger, frustration or fear.

So we are born with emotions but without logic, and when we are young, we endeavor to control our environment through our emotions. If we have good parents, they discipline our emotions at an early age to put us on the road upon which we will spend the rest of our lives, that is, developing self-control and intellect. If our parents are successful, we will eventually develop the personal restraint that characterizes mature adults. I recently saw a commercial for the Army in which a soldier was hidden, observing the enemy from a secret observation post. The voiceover of the commercial said, ‘He had rations for five days. It’s day twelve.’ The point of the commercial is that well-trained men have the maturity to sacrifice even the basic necessities of life, including food, for the cause. We give the highest honors to the soldiers who have died in battle, and consider it the ultimate sign of maturity to intentionally sacrifice ones’ life for others.

Jesus tells us, in **John 15:13**:

13 Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

However, among the immature, there is a condition known as sibling rivalry that begins when a child feels the need to compete with his or her sibling for the attention of their parents. In a common form of sibling rivalry, a firstborn child becomes used to a certain level of attention from his or her parents. When his parents bring a younger sibling into the world, the parents divide their attention between the two siblings, and the older child sees the younger one as a threat to take attention away from him. The older child may decide to regress in his maturity so that he can be the baby again, or may decide to be hostile toward the younger child. At the adult stage of intellectual development, siblings have better relationships in life if they can get along with one another, but at the infant and toddler stage of emotional development, love for a younger sibling may make no sense to an older sibling.

The proper course of action for parents is to reason with the older sibling that he has to give up his old place in the family as the baby, and take on a new place in the family as the "big boy". Parents need to inform their child that there are privileges that come with being older and so there is really no reason to be resentful of the younger sibling. "Well", a wise parent might say, "he's just a baby, so he can't stay up as late as you can, because you're a big boy." A wise parent might give the older sibling some inconsequential decision making authority over the younger sibling to give the older sibling the feeling of being "responsible" for his younger sibling, and thus, having more authority. A wise mother might ask, "Should we put the blue sweater or the brown sweater on your little brother?" to give her older child a feeling of ownership and importance with respect to the younger one. The creation of the "big boy" role lets the older son know that he is still important even though he is not the baby of the family any more.

However, in the case of the two sons in the parable, the older brother flashes back to his immature days, and once again sees himself as supplanted because of his brother's arrival. Since he has no "big boy" role to play, the older son is caught in an emotional rivalry with his brother. Our text for today, **Luke 15:29-30** records:

29 So [the older son] answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.

30 But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'

The older brother's statement in these verses is false on the face of it. Anyone adult child that claims that he has never disobeyed his father is obviously not telling the truth. **Romans 3:23** tells us:

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Since we all sin, it is preposterous for an adult son to claim that he never disobeyed his father. Everyone sins sometime, and the testimony that one has lived in his father's house through childhood, puberty and into adulthood without ever disobeying an instruction from the father is simply not credible.

It is equally not credible that a son would stay with as rich and generous a father as this one through childhood, puberty and into adulthood without ever receiving a gift from his father

that he could use to celebrate with his friends, especially when we consider the fact that this particular father gave his other son enough money to go into the far country and live for several months. The truth is more likely that the father did not give the son that which the son wanted. But the claim that his father never gave him anything for a celebration is simply an exaggeration.

You can tell that an argument is emotional rather than logical because people exaggerate when they are emotional. When we become emotional, we don't care about accuracy, we just want prove our point and get our way. We just want that which we want when we want it, and the facts cease to matter.

The older brother was not concerned about the inaccuracy of his statement, because his statement was not intended to be a factual argument, but an emotional one, designed to play on the father's emotions by contrasting the older brother's loyalty with the younger brother's sin and to declare that the father's love for his younger son was unfair. It's not fair, pouted the older son in his childish temper tantrum, that you gave him everything and didn't give me anything. Now, you have to choose between him and me, and I want you to give me everything.

The error in the older brother's thinking is his premise that since his younger brother lost the father's money in the far country, that the remainder of the father's money belongs to him. That is actually not true. While the father is alive, the father's money actually belongs, not to the older brother or to the younger brother, but to the father himself, and while the father is alive, he can do whatever he wishes with his money, including giving some to his younger brother. The older brother could make an argument that he should receive the father's estate were the father to die, but there is no indication from the parable that the father is dying, or even sick.

The older brother's thinking is both exaggerated and incorrect. His sibling rivalry is based upon a false premise. A father actually can love both brothers at the same time. The father loves all of his children, and can take care of all of his children at the same time.

The Jewish leaders, to whom Jesus is speaking, like the older brother, want to be the only people that God loves. Remember how this discussion began, at the beginning of the chapter?
Luke 15:1-2 says:

1 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to [Jesus] to hear Him.

2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."

Do you hear the complaint of the older brother in the complaint of the scribes and Pharisees?

Do you see the younger brother in the sinners of whom the scribes and Pharisees are complaining? Jesus tells the parable so that all of them will know, and that all of us will know, that we are all God's children, and regardless of the sin that we have committed, the Father is still looking for us to come home and receive His grace, if we will only repent of our sins and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. **John 3:16** tells us:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

The important word is "whoever". There is no one that cannot receive eternal life. What sin you have committed does not matter; how many years you lived in the far country does not matter; how much of the father's substance you wasted does not matter. **2Peter 3:9** tells us:

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is

longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

The important word is all. God the Father does not exclude any of us, but He is Father to us all. **Romans 10:8-13:**

8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach):

9 that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.”

12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him.

13 For “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

The important word is whoever. None of the ceremonial laws of Moses has any effect any more. You don't have to be a Jew to be saved. **Romans 10:4** tells us:

4 For Christ is the end of the [Law of Moses] for righteousness to everyone who believes.

The inheritance is no longer tied to the Law of Moses. As a matter of fact, there is no longer any earthly inheritance. **1Peter 1:3-5** tells us:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The younger son cannot spend his inheritance. The inheritance is no longer a matter of earthly possessions, which will fail to satisfy us and eventually become obsolete, but the inheritance is now incorruptible, meaning that it will never deteriorate or get old and fall apart, and is now undefiled, meaning that it will never spoil or be ruined, and that it is now reserved in heaven, the place of everlasting life.

This inheritance is eternal. Our hope of inheritance is alive, because it is based upon the physical and historical resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Salvation in the New Testament church is not based upon rules and regulations. Salvation in the New Testament church is not based on laws and ceremonies. Salvation in the New Testament church is based upon the Lord Jesus Christ's resurrection from the dead. That is the reason for the father's celebration in the parable. He tells his older son, in **Luke 15:31-32:**

31 “And [the father] said to [his older son], ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.

32 It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’ ”

Both brothers are with their father. The younger brother came to himself and came home. The older brother was afraid of losing his inheritance when the younger brother returned, but the

father reassured the older brother that his inheritance is intact, and that he has enough resources for both the older brother and the younger brother.

God wants us all to be reassured that whether we go into the far country, or whether we stay at home, that He loves us, that our inheritance is intact, and that He has plenty of resources for us all. Paul reassures us, in **Ephesians 3:14-21**:

14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,

17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—

19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us,

21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever.

Amen.

Let us not be preoccupied with the things of this life, but let us build our hopes on things eternal. Hold to God's unchanging hand.

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