

The lost son in the father's house (Luke 15:25-32)

We have been studying the gospel of Luke. We studied the first half of chapter 15, last time.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." This is the beginning of the chapter. They accurately observed what Jesus was doing, but they didn't understand what he meant. So Jesus gave them parables. The parable of a shepherd who rejoices when he found one lost sheep. Then, the parable of a woman who carefully searches one lost coin all over the house, and rejoices over it when she finds it. And finally, the parable of a father who welcomes the prodigal son who lost everything and finally returned to the father.

Here we can learn how much God is interested in one person. For God, one person is so precious that he cannot help searching the person when he is lost. Jesus is teaching us what a great joy it is for God that one person comes back to God.

Today we will study the latter half of a father. The theme of the message is "The lost son in the father's house."

1. The symptoms of lostness

25-32

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've 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. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "

The older son had been with the father all these years, but his *heart* was

not with the father. He didn't understand the meaning, blessing and honor of being with his father as his son. He was living as if he was not with the father. He was living with his father as if he was with a strict employer or under the watch of a ruthless judge. The father welcomed the younger brother who returned to him after he went broke. How hurt he was about the older son who had been with him all the time, but yet he was lost and his heart was not with the father.

The father tried to make the older son notice he was lost, and encourage him to come back to him as his son.

A person will not think about returning, until he notices he is lost and heading toward the wrong direction. Even though he is lost, if he believes he is on the right track, he will continue to move forward to the same direction. And he thinks those who try to return from there are wrong, and will not accept them. This is a very dangerous situation. And it will cause a lot of trouble for those around him.

Let's learn from the older son, about the symptoms of lostness in our relationship with God.

(1) Feel anger when others receive grace

When the older son came home from the field after a day's work, he heard music and dancing from the house. He found that his father was holding a celebration banquet because his brother, who left with all his property, has just come back.

What did the older brother do when he found that? He became angry and refused to go into the house. From the situation before his eyes, he interpreted his father's attitude as follows:

"All these years I've been working so hard for my father. I didn't even go out with my friends for fun. And my father never gave me even a young goat. But now this son of his who has squandered his property came home, my father killed the fattened calf to celebrate for him. I don't understand. Why is he treated so well? He spent all his money for fun, and now that he went broke, can he be accepted without any blame? Father is not fair."

When we deviate from the right relationship with God, we feel angry

when others receive grace.

What was Jesus like? "He was full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

What do we receive in our relationship with Jesus? "For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace." (John 1:16, NASB)

Then, what is grace? "Grace is the unmerited favor of God toward people. Grace is something we have not earned and do not deserve." "Grace is something you can never get, but only be given. There's no way to earn it or deserve it or bring it about any more than you can deserve the taste of raspberries and cream or earn good looks or bring about your own birth." "Grace is unconditional love and acceptance."¹

Man can have relationship with God, because of this grace of God. Without this grace of God, Man cannot have fellowship with God. When we have healthy relationship with Jesus, we know through our experience that we are receiving his grace. It is the truth not only for me, but also for other people. God is gracious to other people, just as he is gracious to you. When we see someone receive God's grace, it reminds us how much grace we have been given.

If we feel anger when we see other people receiving grace, it shows there is something wrong in our relationship with God. If we ourselves are experience God's abundant grace, we will not feel anger no matter how much others are receiving his grace.

(2) Feel anxious about what God thinks of me

The older son couldn't accept the fact that his father not only accepted his younger brother, but also treated him as his son. For the older brother thought his younger brother doesn't deserve to be treated like that, because he left with all his share of property, and squandered everything in wild living.

But the relationship between parents and children cannot be achieved by work, nor can it be lost as a poor result. But the older son was blinded to the truth.

In his father's house, there were many servants with the older son. What are the differences between a son and a servant?

A servant is valued by "what he does". But a son is recognized by "who he is". A servant is accepted by his work, but a son is accepted by the

¹ Henry Cloud, *Changes That Heal*, Zondervan, 1990, (p.21)

relationship with his father. A servant is appreciated by his “productivity and performance”, but a son is secure in his being as a person. A servant “proves his worth by his work”, and he is always anxious because he never knows when it will change. But a son “knows that his worth will never change”, so he is always feeling secure. “A failure” can endanger a servant. But when a son fail, he may feel sad because he has upset his parents, but he will never fear that he may be deserted by his parents.

The older brother was surely the father's son. But he lost the understanding about his son-ship.

If we are nervous before God, feeling as if our behaviors were marked, it shows there is something wrong in our relationship with Him. If we look at ourselves, and feel uneasy about whether we are accepted as His child, there is something wrong in our relationship with Him.

(3) The attitude of “all good” and “all bad”

The older son says to the father, “*All* these years, I have been slaving for you, and *never* disobeyed your orders. On the other hand, my brother has wasted your property and squandered all the money you gave with prostitutes. And all has gone.”

Simply put, he is saying “I’m all good. He is all bad.”

Indeed, he has been working hard for many years. But can he really say he never disobeyed the father’s order? On the surface, probably he worked and lived according to the father’s orders. But what about things which cannot be seen, or things inside his heart?

Surely he also had made mistakes, and had failed sometimes. He is not “all good”. Nevertheless, he has this attitude of “I am all good” before the father. And that is not true. He is having relationship with the father, using his false image, “ I'm all good.”

What about his remark about his brother? Probably he may have indulged in playing with prostitutes. But it is only his imagination that he squandered his property with prostitute. He must also have spent the money for his necessity. He may also have spent money to help others. He may be cheated. You never know. It is a false accusation to call him “all bad.”

Moreover, indeed the younger brother used all the money he had taken. But what he had spent was “his share” of the estate, and not all of his father’s property. When the younger brother asked the father to give him his share of the property, the father “divided it between them” in v.12.

The older brother’s share of the property *is* with him. How the younger brother uses his share of the property is up to him. It is his problem that he used up all his money.

It is only the older brother’s assumption that his brother is “all bad”. It is not right for him to accuse his brother as “all bad” before the father. There is something wrong in his relationship with his father.

If we have the attitude of “I’m all good, he is all bad” or “He is all good, I’m all bad,” there is something wrong in our relationship with God.

(4) Measure our relationship with God by material blessings we receive

The older son appealed to his father, “All these years, I’ve been slaving for you. But you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.”

He has not been satisfied with how his father related to him. It was not triggered by this one incident, by the fact that his father held a party to celebrate the younger brother’s safe return. His discontent against his father has been smoldering for many years.

He thought if he worked hard, his father would give him a calf or something so he could enjoy meal with his friends. However, no matter how hard he worked, the father didn’t give him anything as he expected. He thought maybe his work was not enough, so he worked even harder. He never took a break, worked every day more than the schedule. He worked more than anyone in the house.

One year has passed, and then two years and many years has passed. But the father still didn’t give him even a young goat for him to celebrate with his friends. On the surface, he was serving the father, but in his heart, his discontent against his father had become bigger and bigger, and finally exploded. “You killed the fattened calf for the one who haven’t done any work, but instead, squandered your property! But for me, I worked so hard all these years, and you don’t even give me a young goat!”

In short, he measured his relationship with the father in terms of reward

for his work.

That is the relationship between an employer and a worker. A father doesn't give what he has for his child as his reward. Regardless of his work, just because he is his child, because of love, the father will share what he has with his child. The father says this, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours."

If we measure what God think of us by how much material blessings we receive, there is something wrong in our relationship with Him. If we become suspicious against God, because we are not given the material wealth as we expected, there is something wrong in our relationship with God.

(5) Cannot rejoice over the recovery of others

Because the younger son came home, the father was so glad that he held a celebration banquet. But the older son was so angry that he wouldn't even enter the house. And the father came out from the house to the older son, and tried to calm him down. The father says "Your brother was dead and is alive again!" The father's concern is over the younger brother's life.

Then, what about the older brother's concern? His concern was over the fact that he never received even a young goat, and over the fact the younger brother used up all the money he received from the father, and yet the father killed the fattened calf to celebrate his return. His concern was over things, the things he was to receive. He didn't really care about his brother.

If we cannot rejoice over the recovery of others, there is something wrong in our relationship with God.

Let's imagine how the older brother felt. After the younger brother received his share of the estate and left, how had he been feeling about him? "While I am working so hard here, he must be playing around, enjoying luxurious, easy life. But he will have to pay for it someday." He may have felt envious, or he may have felt hatred against his brother.

Then, what about after the brother came home? How did he feel about it? The father welcomed him as his son again. He could stay in the father's house as his son, and must have been given food and clothes, just as the older brother received. He must have worked just like the older brother. How did the older brother feel about this younger brother? Was he bitter, or feeling unable to accept him? Or did he wish the brother was not there with him? Was he glad if

the brother disappears?

These feelings are the problems the older brother himself need to deal with. Unless he solves these problems in his heart, he will keep having these negative feelings inside. Those feelings will keep torturing him, and prevent him from accepting his younger brother.

Moreover he had no idea about how hurt the father was because he can't rejoice over his brother's return.

He was in the father's house, but he was also a lost son. The father is trying to recover the lost son in his house. This is how Jesus felt when he talked to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. But, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law didn't realize that they were also lost. They had no idea about how heartbroken God is, because of their attitude.

2. The lost son in the father's house

"There was a man who had two sons." (v.11)

The younger son left his father's house. And he lived as he wanted. One day, he realized that he was about to lose his life. He said to himself, "I'll go back to my father." He went back to his father and was received as his son again. He was once lost, but now came back to his father. He used to be a source of grief to his father, but now became joy to his father.

The older son had been in his father's house all the time. He always helped his father's work earnestly. He never pestered his father for anything. He was very "good son". However, he was also a lost son for his father.

What does it mean to be lost while he is in his father's house?

His heart was far away from his father's heart. He didn't even try to know his father's thought. He concluded what his father's thought is like, at his own discretion. He thought if he works hard, he would be acknowledged by his father and would receive better reward.

He didn't know, or didn't even try to know how precious he was for his father. For he was his son, he was loved unconditionally. He could receive what is his father's without work. Although his father loved him so much, he just tried to receive material riches from his father.

His father loved him because he was his son. But he related to his father

as if he was his employer or judge who evaluate his worth according to his work.

He was a lost son for his father while he was in his father's house. How heartbroken his father is! How painful his heart for his son is!

What about you? How about your relationship with God, the Father?

If you ask God, "Dear God, bless my life." "Meet my material need and bless me financially." "Give me strength and wisdom to get through in this difficult society so that I can carry on my work," God may answer your prayer. But if that is your relationship with Him, how heartbroken God is!

If you ask God, "I did this much for you. Give me what is proportionate to my work." "I made this many sacrifices, I have served you so earnestly. Please evaluate me higher and reward me," God may answer your request. But if that is your relationship with God, His heart will be filled with pain.

"Father, there is no greater joy than being with you. To remain in your love, that is my peace and strength. Your Word is my comfort, and light. I am proud to be your child." When we are in this kind of relationship with our Father God, His heart will be filled with joy.

When God shows what is wrong in our heart, it is not because he wants to make us feel miserable, nor because he wants to punish us. But he wants us to realize we are lost, while living in his house, that our heart is far from Him, while living with him, and he wants us to come back to Him.

You are precious for God. You are God's great joy.