



The centerpiece of the parable is a feast. The father throws a feast, filled with “music and dancing” and the greatest delicacies, to mark the reconciliation and restoration of his son. There was no choice.

Luke 15:11-32 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. "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'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. 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; he was lost and is found.' "

Reflections

Ah...the feast. Celebration in the air. Music, dancing, seriously good food. What a picture this is, that exposes the rifts, sharpens the message, shows us the Father. I'd like to look once more from the standpoint of the elder brother, because there is a question there that seems to me to point forward to where we are going these next few weeks.

Consider. The elder brother returns from the fields. He hears the sound of feasting, gets a servant's quick summary (your brother has returned and your father...), and gets angry. There follows an exchange with his father that exposes a profound disconnect. "All these years I have worked, yet you never *gave* me..." vs. "We *had* to celebrate...because he was lost and is found." You are *rewarding* him, vs. we are *celebrating* his homecoming. A disconnect that points pretty close to the core of our gospel.

But stand back a minute, put yourself in the elder brother's shoes, and simply ask, how is he really supposed to tell the difference? The fattened calf has been killed, the best robe presented, a ring given. Celebration? Or (unjust) reward. Both versions "fit the facts" pretty well, *if we see only the externals*. How to tell?

And here is where yet another jewel lies in this wonderful story. For I would assert that there is really only one way to tell, and that is to see into the father's heart. There, in that heart, is where this celebration has its roots, in its love, in its intense desire, at all costs, for the family to be whole, in the rejoicing that the son has returned.

"If you have seen me, you have seen the Father," Jesus told us. And perhaps it is for us, as we recount next the story of Jesus' passion, to understand that there, in Jesus, is the Father's heart. We have seen it, in all its power and its love and its

desire for *us* to come home. In the obedient elder son who opened the way.

What's wrong with the elder brother? Why can't he see? He doesn't miss the externals, but his heart is not at all aligned with his father's. The father in this story *had* to celebrate. Because this is *what* the Father celebrates. This coming home. *Our* coming home. A deep promise of our faith walk is that God will work in us, not just to bring us home, but to give us a heart that aligns with His, that we see the world as He sees it, love what He loves, work for, and *celebrate*, what He celebrates.

Make my heart like yours, Oh God.

— Bob Henderson

Series Resource:

The Prodigal God, Timothy Keller, Zondervan, 2008.

Readings

Sunday, March 21

Luke 15:11-32

Lamentations 3:31-33

Repentance is a change of heart that results in changed life direction. What encouragement do you get from this scripture and God's response to his repentant children?

Monday, March 22

Romans 5:1-11

Romans 8:18-21

In ancient times a feast had more dimensions to it than merely eating. It was a time to sing, dance, renew relationships, celebrate community, etc. What joys do you most anticipate at the feast of the father?

Tuesday, March 23

Ephesians 1:3-14

John 15:9-17

"Jesus' love can become more real to you than the love of anyone else." How has Jesus' love been real to you?

Wednesday, March 24

Galatians 3:1-14

In what ways can "religion" be an obstacle for us as we seek to obey Christ?

Thursday, March 25

Romans 12:1-8

Ezekiel 36:24-37

"Behavioral compliance to rules without heart change will be superficial and fleeting." How then is real, lasting change possible?

Friday, March 26

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

What does reconciliation mean to you? What does God do through Christ? Through us? For us?

Saturday, March 27

Luke 15:11-32

What have you learned about yourself from studying this parable? Who do you most identify with – the younger son, the older son, the father?

Don't have a Bible? Access these scriptures at biblegateway.com.