

52. Jesus Taught About the Unrepentant Son

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children grow in their understanding of the greatness of the love of God. We also saw the greatness of the joy of the Father over every sinner that repents. The tax collectors and sinners were probably filled with great joy as they understood the love of the Father for them. In contrast, today we will see that the older son gives us a real picture of the scribes and Pharisees who were complaining because Jesus received sinners and ate with them.

We see that the older son was angry and would not join the celebration that was being held for the return of his younger brother. Luke 15:25-28 says, “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 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.” But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.” These verses show us many things about the heart of the older son. He was not happy that the father showed love and mercy to the younger son.

The younger son had been in the pigpen when he realized that he had sinned and made the decision to return to the father. In contrast, the older son was in the field of the father doing the work that needed to be done. We are going to see that he had a very self-righteous attitude. As the older son came close to the house, he heard the noise of music and dancing. We can see that the celebration for the return of the younger son was a great celebration. This is a reminder of the joy in heaven over one sinner that repents.

The older brother immediately called one of the servants and asked him what was going on in the house. The servant told the older brother that his younger brother had come home. He said that the father was so thankful that his son had come home safe and sound that the father had killed the fatted calf and they were celebrating. Suddenly, the older son became very angry and refused to go into the house. This chapter started by saying in Luke 15:1-2, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’” Here, we see that the Pharisees and scribes were complaining because Jesus ate with sinners. Suddenly, the Pharisees and scribes had to realize that their complaints showed their own anger and that they were like the older brother. They were refusing to accept the tax collectors and sinners and they were angry that Jesus accepted them. The proud cannot be joyful about heaven when they hear that sinners will be there.

We see that the older son refused to go into the house. As a result, we see that the father came out and pleaded with him. Here, we see the love of the father for the older son. The father had run to meet the younger son. Now, he went out to talk with the older son. His love for the older son was just as great as his love for the younger son. In fact, we read that the father pleaded with the older son. The word translated “pleaded” means *to call to one’s side, to beseech, to comfort or to exhort*. This is the word that is used in the vision that Paul received during the night in Acts 16:9-10 where we read, “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with

him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’ Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.” Here, we see that God used a man pleading in a vision to guide Paul and the team with him to take the Gospel to the continent of Europe.

Instead of listening to the pleading of the father, the older son showed his pride by his answer to the father. Luke 15:29 says, “So he 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.” Here, we see that the older son thought that he had faithfully served his father. He thought that he had lived a very good life. In fact, his words sounded almost like the prayer of the Pharisee who prayed in Luke 18:10-12 where we read, “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, “God, I thank You that I am not like other men--extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.”” I often tell people that sin and pride are very similar; they both have “I” in the center. The older brother certainly had pride as he compared himself to his brother.

The scribes and Pharisees also thought that they were serving God. The scribes made copies of various books of the Old Testament. The Pharisees thought that they were acceptable to God, because they made many rules which they tried to get others to obey. Matthew 23:1-4 says, “Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: ‘The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, *that* observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay *them* on men's shoulders; but they *themselves* will not move them with one of their fingers.” Here, we see that they told others what to do, but they were totally unwilling to obey their own rules. In fact, they were just hypocrites.

The older son told the father that even though he had never disobeyed any of the commandments of the father that the father never gave him a young goat to make merry with his friends. This statement tells us that the reason why the older son tried to obey the commandments of his father was to get what he could get for his own pleasure. He had not done any of the things that he did to please God. 1 John 2:16 says, “For all that *is* in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.” He was quick to complain about the fact that he thought that his brother was guilty of the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes. However, at the same time, he chose to ignore the pride that was in his own life.

The older son had a complete misunderstanding of the compassion of the father. Luke 15:30-32 says, “““But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.” And he said to him, “Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. 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.””” The older brother showed his bitterness by calling his younger brother “your son” instead of even admitting that the younger son was also his brother. In the same way, the scribes and Pharisees did not even want to admit that the tax collectors and sinners were also Jews.

The older brother immediately told the father that his son had devoured his livelihood with harlots. Here, we see another characteristic of the Pharisees. The older brother condemned the younger brother with no evidence that his brother had even done these things since he had not even seen him yet. Early in His ministry, Jesus had warned about judging others in His Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7:1-5 says, “Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, “Let me remove the speck from your eye”; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” The word translated “judge” means *to be of the opinion or to condemn*. Whether the older brother was right or wrong, he did not know. However, he had certainly formed an opinion and condemned his brother.

The Pharisees condemned people and called them sinners because they thought that these people were guilty of immorality. This is shown very clearly in John 8:3-7 which says, “Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?’ This they said, testing Him, that they might have *something* of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with *His* finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, ‘He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first.’” The Pharisees did not even realize that they had also condemned themselves because it requires two people for a person to be caught in the very act of adultery. In this passage, they only brought the woman.

Even though the older son judged and condemned his brother, the father also showed his love to the older son. The older son had also received his inheritance. Luke 15:12 says, “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.” The father divided the inheritance to both sons immediately. That meant that the older son actually got two-thirds of the inheritance, because the older son received a double portion of the inheritance. However, the father wanted the older son to have more than just the inheritance. He also wanted to have fellowship with the older son. The older son was making the choice to reject that fellowship with the father, because we never read that he came into the house. In the same way, the scribes and Pharisees rejected eternal life even though it was freely offered and would be paid for by Jesus.

We want to help our physical and spiritual children to clearly understand why the older son gave an example of the way that the scribes and Pharisees had rejected the offer of eternal life that Jesus offered to them as a free gift. Their pride so controlled most of their lives that they were unwilling to accept that offer of eternal life. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to understand the scribes and Pharisees.