

Jesus' Greatest Hits

The Jealous Brother

Part 16 - October 7, 2007

[VIDEO: PARTY AT MY HOUSE]

Ever been to a party, and wish you were someplace else? Maybe it wasn't your crowd; maybe it was too loud; maybe you were just in a bad mood. Parties aren't fun if you don't fit in. Jesus finished the parable of The Prodigal Son with a feast and music and dancing - because the younger son had returned!

He continues the story with the parable of The Jealous Brother; and His warning is quite simple: don't be a party-pooper!

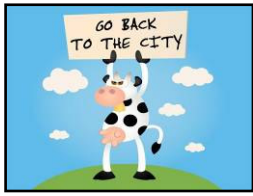
Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. "Your brother has come," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound." The older brother 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." - *Luke 15:25-32 NIV*

Q: Do you remember the two surprises in The Prodigal Son?

1. The father releases his rebellious son with a third of his estate, and lets him squander it in the "far country".
2. And then, the father receives his returning repentant son with open arms and readily forgives him and restores him.

Jesus now adds a parable onto a parable. This father has *two* sons: the first was backslider; the second is a backbiter. The backslider represented the self-loathing sinners in Jesus' audience; the backbiter represents the self-righteous sinners.

While the father is celebrating the return of his son, the older brother comes in from the field and doesn't like what he hears. The older brother wasn't the only one who wasn't happy to see the rebellious prodigal return.



Q: Know who was even more upset?

A: The fattened calf!

In Jesus' day, fattened calves were only cooked for *huge* gatherings. This father had invited the entire community.

The celebration was part of the restoration. The father was publicly reinstating his son.

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. - *Luke 15:28 NIV*

True to form, this parable has a surprise for Jesus' audience. This elder son's behavior is a shocking, serious insult and a public humiliation for the father. He should've been enraged; but instead he: "Went out and pleaded with him". This father is the picture of patience and longsuffering.

When the eldest son opens his mouth, he reveals his heart:

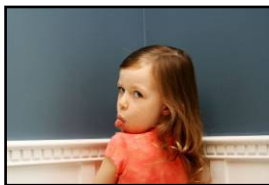
But he answered his father, "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. - *Luke 15:29b-30 NIV*

Listen to how he speaks: All these years I've been "slaving" for you and never disobeyed your "orders". He sees his father as a task-master.



- He has confused subjection with submission.

All this time he's been *begrudgingly* following *commands*, subjecting himself to *rules* without submitting himself to *relationship*. It's obedience without the desire to obey!



Without desire, it's a *chore* to stay on the "farm". Only intimacy with God as a *Father* can transform reluctant subjection into willing submission. Obedience must originate in the heart.

He was trying to earn the love of a father who gave it freely.

And: "never disobeyed"?! He's being disobedient right now! We can only tolerate the imperfections of others to the degree we're aware of our own. But there's something else ... something more sinister here. This isn't how someone talks who knows what a blessing it is to remain close to the father and under his care. I think he secretly envied his brothers "freedom" from the farm! Have you ever envy the sinfulness of others?

"They're having all that "fun" ... and then they can just ask for forgiveness and ... poof! It don't seem fair!"

He's upset because he thinks his little brother is "getting away" with something. He leaves, he sins, he gets a party! This is a *profound* misunderstanding of sin! But it's easy to get confused in our culture because of the distorted reality in the media, and the delayed effects in real life.

But it's like *getting away* with radiation contamination.

"In this movie, I saw these people fondling uranium, and it made them really happy! And there weren't any negative consequences! And I know someone who was exposed just yesterday, and they're still healthy!"



- You don't "get away" with sin, you suffer it.

Maybe his brother will tell him about the poor Jew who fed pigs and ate out of their trough, and who came home to a great feast and a gracious father.

That which God calls sin, He does so because it's destructive.

But for now, he doesn't think life is fair.

... 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!" - *Luke 15:29b-30 NIV*

"Prostitutes"? Who said anything about prostitutes?! That's not in the parable of the Prodigal son. He hasn't spoken with his brother. He doesn't know what happened in that distant country ... but he can sure imagine! And he's so bitter he won't even acknowledge the prodigal as his brother. Instead he says, "This son of yours".

I want you to notice something that I've always overlooked, clear back at the beginning of the prodigal son parable:

A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me." So he divided his wealth between them. - *Luke 15:11-12 NIV*

Q: Do you see it?

"He divided his wealth between" ... "them"



When the father gave the prodigal his third, he simultaneously gave his eldest son two-thirds! *Everything* belonged to the jealous brother, but he was working with no sense of ownership.

He saw his work as a burden to bear, not an inheritance to enjoy.

So, when pouty says, "You never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends", his father must be thinking, "Never gave you a goat?! I gave you EVERY goat - and EVERY fat calf!" And yet, the father responds with such grace and gentleness:

"My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours." - Luke 15:31 NIV

First, the father reminds him: You are "My son", not my slave. "Our relationship is not based on your works, but my grace." And then he lovingly reminds him of two things:

1. He should appreciate *what* he has - "Everything I have is yours"

Literally! Sometimes we withhold grace from others because we forget how much grace the Father has extended to us. I will never be asked to forgive more than I have been forgiven.

2. He should appreciate *who* he has - "You are always with me"

He's saying, "It's not your work I cherish, it's YOU." Some believers miss their share of joy, not because they haven't found it, but because they don't take time to enjoy the Father.

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. - Luke 15:32 NIV

The jealous brother had said, "This son of yours". The father reminds him: "This brother of yours". And he says: "We had to celebrate". It's not about who was good and who was bad; it's about who was lost and now is found! "We *had* to celebrate, because this feast is for *me*!"

It's about the joy and relief and delight of a forgiving father over a once-rebellious, now-forgiven child. And it's the same with communion. It's the *Lord's Supper*! It's a time for self-loathing sinners and self-righteous sinners alike to examine our faith and realign our relationship. But, the heart of communion is the exultation and the jubilation of a forgiving Father over His forgiven children! This is *His* party, in our honor!

Let's see how well you've been listening; answer *true* or *false* when I ask the questions. In this passage, we've learned that:

1. Failing to forgive will keep you out of the party.
2. Everything He has is yours.
3. If you sin quick and ask for forgiveness, nobody gets hurt.
4. You can't join God's party if you're throwing a pity party.