

Red Chairables

The Jealous Brother

Part 4 – August 8, 2010

[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 simple: don't be a party-poop!

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*

The father in this parable has two sons, the prodigal and his judgmental older brother. One's a backslider; one's a backbiter! The elder despises his backslidden little brother. And Jesus tells this story to expose the self-righteous in his audience.



Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." - *Luke 15:1-2 NIV*

So, in response to this, Jesus tells the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son – or, the Prodigal Son.

He demands his inheritance and squanders it on wild living. Yet, when he repents, his father forgives him with open arms. In fact, he kills a fattened calf and everyone celebrates.



Well, not quite everyone. The hard working brother comes in from the field, sees all the fuss, and doesn't like what's going on. But he's not the only one in the parable who refuses to welcome the prodigal son home. Do you know who was even *more* upset and irate? The fattened calf! And since there was no refrigeration for leftovers, fattened calves were reserved for huge parties and celebrations. The father had invited the whole community to share in his joy!

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. - *Luke 15:28a NIV*

This is a rebellious insult and another public humiliation for this gracious father. He should've been outraged; but, true to form, Jesus offers a provoking surprise in the father's reaction.

So his father went out and pleaded with him. - *Luke 15:28b NIV*

And when the elder son opens his mouth, he reveals his heart. Just listen to how he speaks to his patient, forgiving father:



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

This isn't a son who's gratefully submitting to what he perceives as a gracious father. No, he sees himself as *enslaved* and his father as his *task-master*! This is a hallmark of self-righteous believers, who substitute rules for relationship and legalism for love.

He doesn't know his father. There's no relationship. If there was, he'd appreciate his father's grace. And *that* appreciation would naturally produce a joyful desire to partner and serve. Obedience must be motivated by gratitude.

And gratitude only comes with understanding; and understanding only comes with intimacy. We must draw close to the Father, talk to the Father, and learn all we can about the Father's heart. Otherwise, there's no joyful desire to partner and serve.

And without that, it's just an unpleasant chore to stay on the farm.

Jesus once said that Pharisees are like whitewashed tombs: orderly on the outside while decaying on the inside. The self-righteous excel at whitewashing their virtue and morality. The jealous brother says that he's: "never disobeyed". I find it hard to believe that someone who publically humiliates their father with outright rebellion has *never* disobeyed before; not to mention the fact that he's *currently* disobeying!

Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. -
Luke 15:29 NIV

Someone doesn't think life is fair. This kid is so ungrateful and so self-focused that he can't even see the obvious. Look at something Jesus says at the beginning of the story:

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*

Do you see it: "He divided his wealth between" ... "them"



When the prodigal got his third of the father's estate, the elder son received his *two-thirds*! *Everything* left belongs to the jealous brother. He's been working with *no* sense of ownership. He can't see what he's been given because mentally he's still trying to *earn* it - all these years *wasted*, trying to earn the love of a father who has offered it freely all along.

Both sons have *wasted* their inheritance: The prodigal through sins of the flesh. The brother through sins of the spirit.

The jealous brother only sees the farmstead as a burden to bear, instead of an inheritance to possess, invest, and enjoy. And, do I detect a **note** of envy?

But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him! - *Luke 15:30 NIV*

Who said anything about "Prostitutes"?! This is conjecture. The jealous brother doesn't *know* what happened in that distant country; but apparently he can imagine!

You ever secretly envy someone's sinfulness? It's a common temptation for believers in a culture where media bombards us with the distorted reality of consequence-free sin.

He seems to think his little brother is "getting away" with something. "He's had all his 'fun' and now the slate's just wiped clean?! He leaves, he squanders, and he gets a *party!*" He grossly underestimates the cost and consequence of sin! Getting away with sin is like getting away with radiation poisoning.



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

"In a movie, I saw people fondling uranium, and the contamination made them happy! And then I saw people posing in a magazine with radioactive isotopes, and they were *sexy!*"

Here's something the prodigal learned in the pigpen: sin builds slowly, steadily, and silently until it has the power to destroy.

And the jealous brother is so bitter he won't even acknowledge the prodigal as his brother. Instead he says: "This son of yours".

Instead of leaning on and embracing God's grace, the self-righteous judge in order to quantify and bolster their own sense of goodness, morality, and ultimately superiority.

Self-righteousness is a temptation that *increases* as we grow in faith. It's the attraction to be impressed by our own godliness.

So, here's this self-righteous son in a nutshell:

- A. Insulting his father with disobedience
- B. Devaluing his father's grace and mercy
- C. Identifying his father as a taskmaster
- D. Exaggerating his loyalty and obedience
- E. Ignoring the inheritance he's received
- F. Accusing his father of being unfair and stingy
- G. Envyng the sins of his little brother
- H. And taking offense at his father's forgiveness

And how does his father respond? With gentleness and kindness!

"My son," the father said ... - *Luke 15:31a NIV*

First, the father reminds him: "You are My *son*, not my *slave*. Our relationship is not based on *your* effort, but *my* grace."

... "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours." - *Luke 15:31b NIV*

He's saying, "It's not your works I cherish, it's *your company*." And, He tenderly corrects and redirects his child: "You need to stop undervaluing our relationship and your inheritance." Unbroken fellowship is far more precious than forgiveness.

But we had to celebrate and be glad ... - *Luke 15:32a*

The feast isn't *for* the prodigal; it's *because of* the prodigal. "We're celebrating the joy and relief and delight of a forgiving father over a once-rebellious, now-repentant child." "The celebration is *mine*! And if you love me, you'll share my joy."

The envious brother had said, "This son of yours"; so, the father corrects this arrogance and reminds him of his connection:

... because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. - *Luke 15:32 NIV*

It's not about who was good and who was bad; it's about who was lost and now is found! So, don't withhold grace and don't look down on others, because you'll never be asked to forgive more than *you've* been forgiven.

Failing to forgive will only keep you out of the party.