

## Message #77

## Luke 15:25-32

Years ago, I clipped out an article from Newsweek Magazine about a building project that took place in San Francisco. An apartment building complex was being built by a team of rehabilitated convicts from prison. All of the workers on the job were either reformed drug addicts, thieves or a variety of other of the criminal element of society. For their work on the project, each man would have the privilege of living in one of the new apartments.

When the project first began, there was a major outcry from many in the city. Many did not think this would work. Many did not think the men were any different. Many did not think the men deserved a second chance and they thought it would not ever succeed. But when all was said and done, it did work and it did succeed. In fact, this program is still operative.

One of the men who was interviewed for the Newsweek article said, "I made some wrong choices years ago in my life, but I am different now. I have changed and this job has proved that we can make a valuable contribution to society."

Whenever someone who has made some wrong choices in life finally gets straightened out, there will be those who will stand on the side lines saying, "They will never make it; they are not any different and you are foolish to give them another chance." This is especially true when it comes to spirituality and religious Pharisees. **It is certainly true in this parable of the prodigal son.**

Every once in a while a child of God makes some wrong choices and gets convicted and comes to terms with those choices. Then he makes a decision to turn back to God. When he does there are those Pharisees who are ready to say, "He will never make it; he will never amount to anything; he doesn't deserve another chance." **Jesus did not think like that and this parable does not illustrate that.**

There is no question that the prodigal son made some wrong choices in life. He took his father's money, his inheritance, and he went into a distant country and he blew it all on a heathen lifestyle. But circumstances tracked him down; he hit rock bottom and he finally came to his senses about his sin and he went back home.

When he got home, he found a gracious, loving, wonderful father waiting for him. The father saw him and had compassion on him and ran to him and embraced him and kissed him. He clothed him with the finest clothing and restored him to full fellowship.

But then the other member of the family came on the scene. It was his elder, pharisaical brother. He came home and it was now his turn to react. He does not react like the father. In fact, he is angry and doesn't believe anyone deserves a second chance, even his own brother.

As this parable comes to its conclusion, Jesus Christ wants to make one more critical point:

**WHEN A STRAYING CHILD REPENTS OF HIS SIN, THOSE WHO ARE CHRIST-LIKE REJOICE AND RESTORE, BUT THOSE WHO ARE PHARISEES BECOME JEALOUS AND ANGRY.**

As we have journeyed through this amazing parable, Jesus presents five amazing truths. We have already observed three of them:

- Truth #1** - The younger son rebelled. **15:11-16**
- Truth #2** - The broken son repented. **15:17-20a**
- Truth #3** - The loving father restored. **15:20b-24**
- Truth #4** - The elder son rejects. **15:25-30**
- Truth #5** - The loving father responds. **15:31-32**

Pharisees don't like it when sinners come home. A Pharisee would just as soon see a sinner destroyed rather than saved. The last thing a Pharisee wants is for a sinner to be right with Jesus Christ and take off and develop in grace.

**TRUTH #4 – The pharisaical elder son rejects the restored son. **15:25-30****

When the erring sinful brother repented and came home, the elder Pharisaical son did not know it and he did not like it. He had three responses:

**Response #1** - The pharisaical elder son researched the reason for the party. **15:25-27**

When the elder son came in from the field, he heard sounds of music and dancing. He had been working in the field and when he got within range of the house, he heard the noise of all of this.

It is interesting that the Greek word “music” is *sumphonias* (συμφωνιας) from which we get our English word “symphony.” It would seem from this that there were several instruments being played. The reason why it was possible to hear “dancing” is because Jewish dances were done while singing certain choral numbers and there were many orderly steps, which included the clapping of hands. There is a lot of hand clapping and finger snapping in Jewish songs.

Well when the elder son came in from the field and heard this, he immediately wanted to know what was happening. He could not imagine someone having a good time without him. S. Lewis Johnson once described a legalist as one who lives in constant fear that that someone, somewhere might be enjoying himself and having a good time.

When the elder brother questioned what is happening, he got one of the servants to go check (v. 26). The servant came back and told him “your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound” (v. 27).

It is interesting to see that the word for “servant” (*παιδον*) is a word that refers to a servant who is very young, like a little, young child.

Pharisees are always sneaking around behind the scenes trying to get the scoop from those who aren't able to see who or what he really is. A Pharisee gets people to do his bidding who can't figure him out.

**Response #2** - The pharisaical elder son reacts to the homecoming party of his brother. **15:28**

This Pharisaical brother could care less that his brother is safe and sound. He is mad because his brother is getting attention he is not getting.

There were two reactions of this elder brother:

**(Reaction #1)** - The pharisaical elder son was angry. **15:28a**

The word for “angry” (ωργισθη) is one that means he became hot with a very impulsive and explosive and passionate wrathful anger (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 322). This is a passive verb, which means this wrath and anger just overtook him. This is the kind of anger that would rather see his brother dead than alive. He was raging mad.

**Pharisees do not relate to grace.** This is the very point of this entire chapter. Grace angers a Pharisee. If the father would have stoned the brother or made him crawl, this brother would have been happy. But when his father demonstrated grace, it made him angry.

Think about this, Martin Luther was hated by most in the religious world because he promoted grace. Grace is forgiveness that is not deserved and cannot be earned. It is not by works, law or Religion.

Pharisees cannot stand it when grace is demonstrated to any sinner (i.e. Luke 15:2). A Pharisee wants to see sinners punished, not forgiven. **The real problem with a Pharisee is that he hasn't really seen himself for whom or what he really is. He has not really analyzed his own heart because if he did, he would understand grace.**

**(Reaction #2)** - The pharisaical elder son refused to participate. **15:28b**

This son was not about to put his stamp of approval on this party. He was not willing to even go into the party. He didn't even want to see his repentant brother.

Years ago, there was a girl in our ministry who wasn't married who got pregnant. She was broken and wanted to do what was right and she faced her sin. Some of our ladies decided to give her a baby shower and there was this Pharisaical woman, who actually ended up being a liar and fraud, who refused to go to that shower and tried to keep others from going. She was just like this Pharisaical son.

He was not about to show any support for some sinner who repented. He was not going to associate in any way with this brother who had wandered far away into sin.

His self-righteous piety would not allow him to do such a thing.

Now just think about how this works in the mind of a Pharisee. He expects the Holy God of the universe to have intimate love and fellowship with him, but he does not want that same God to have intimate love and fellowship with sinners.

**Response #3** - The pharisaical elder son presents his reasoning to his father. **15:28c-30**

According to **verse 28**, the father had to go out of the party to talk to the son who refused to go into the party. This dad, frankly, has a couple of jerks for sons. One of the sons walked away and went into sin and then finally got right with God and the other son is a self-righteous Pharisee who hates grace.

When you read this you cannot help but feel sorry for God, who has to put up with people like us. When I think of the proud rebellion in my own life, I say, boy, God, you really got stuck with a winner in me. Frankly, in one way or another we are either like the first son or the second son. Either way, God is no great winner having any of us in His family.

When the father went out to talk with his son, the son starts accusing the father. He makes two accusations about the father:

**Accusation #1** - He accuses the father of showing partiality against him. **15:29**

When this elder son opens his mouth, we get a real good look at his heart. The son makes three allegations:

**(Allegation #1)** - He has been a faithful servant for many years. **15:29a**

The word that the son uses for “servant” would indicate that he viewed himself and his commitment to his father as slavery. He viewed his existence as being slave labor. He did not view it as a privilege. This was in his mind a legal responsibility he had. His heart had never been in it.

**(Allegation #2)** - He has been completely obedient for many years. **15:29b**

This son is claiming he has obeyed every command ever given him all through time. He is claiming he has never erred. He is a typical Pharisee. A Pharisee actually believes he has kept all the commandments of God and has never missed the mark.

William Kelly observed this unhappy sinner had no sense of his own sin. Frankly, if this were true, then why would you not go into the party that your father is throwing? One of the key commands of Scripture is to honor your father and the father is being dishonored right here. The father’s will was to have this son come to the party, which he refused. Right here is disobedience.

Pharisees don't think straight or see straight. They actually believe they are righteous and right. They have the external appearance and do not see the truth about their own dark heart.

**(Allegation #3)** - He was never given a party like this. **15:30**

Pharisees hate it when someone else gets the attention. He was mad because his brother was getting attention he never got. **But remember this, this party is to welcome home one who has been deep in sin and this Pharisee does not see himself as being a sinner. Naturally there never would be party like this for him.**

**Accusation #2** - He accuses the father of showing favor to sinners. **15:30**

**This is, by the way, what grace does. It shows undeserved favor to sinners.** This son so hates his brother he refers to him as "this son of yours"; not my brother. According to this Pharisee this son did not deserve to be his brother. He had got out in the world and spent his money on prostitutes and other things.

Any Pharisee hates grace and cannot relate to grace. But any person right with God loves grace and loves someone who gets right with God.

**TRUTH #5** – The loving father responds to his pharisaical son. **15:31-32**

This father was a gracious man and he had two responses:

**Response #1** - He reminds the son of his abiding wealth. **15:31**

This older son was foolish. He had access to all of the fellowship and blessings and provisions of this father all of his life. He had enjoyed his father's wealth for years and years and he never should have been jealous about one who had to eat swine's food.

This brother should have been rejoicing for two reasons:

**(Reason #1)** - His brother was finally right with God.

**(Reason #2)** - He never had to go through the humiliation of his brother.

Pharisees are so out of touch with reality that they do not see the amazing blessings they have.

**Response #2** - He reminds the son of the right grace response. **15:32**

Notice what the father does here. His son had called the prodigal "your son" (v. 30). The father calls the prodigal "your brother" (v. 32).

The father says this is the right thing to do. You have to be a stone-cold Pharisee not to celebrate the return of a son who has been deep in sin.

**Heaven rejoices when a sinner repents (15:7, 10) and it is only right that believer do on earth what is done in heaven.**

God's grace is in the restoration business. God loves to have broken down sinners come to Him. He takes them just as they are and then goes to work on restoring them. When that happens, those Pharisees will become jealous and angry.

In this passage there are four types of people:

- 1) There is the rebellious son.
- 2) There is the repentant son.
- 3) There is the pharisaical son.
- 4) There is the loving and forgiving father.

Which type fits you?

Perhaps you have been mangled by sin. If you will turn from your sin and turn to Jesus Christ, you will experience the full grace of God and you will end up with a happy life. Get right with God now. Turn from your sin and turn to God and heaven will rejoice.

That is the parable of the Prodigal Son.