

GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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The Elder Brother

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When we consider the parable Jesus gives in Luke 15:11-32, most of us would immediately call to mind the “prodigal son.” In fact this parable is frequently titled such, but is this parable’s purpose to teach about the younger prodigal son?

Before we dive any deeper into the explanation of this parable we must first establish the context. In Luke 15:1-2 we find Jesus teaching “publicans and sinners.” Jesus’ attention to these erring people did not sit well with the Jews at all. The scripture states that they “murmured, saying, ‘This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.’” Clearly the Pharisees and scribes repudiated the thought of conversing and giving so much attention to sinners. It was on the basis of their murmuring we find the context of all of Jesus’ parables in Luke 15.

In Luke 15:12 Jesus begins the parable with the focus on the younger son. This young prodigal demands his father’s inheritance and leaves the family only to squander everything that had been given to him. It is at this point in the parable we find so much appli-

cation in regards to our own transgression and falling away from God. Numerous points of principle and application have focused on the younger son, yet while these points are certainly warranted Jesus’ main purpose of the parable has yet to be completely revealed.

As we continue through verse 20 we find that the younger brother comes to his senses and returns to his fathers house. Luke 15:20-24 shows the father’s joyous reception given for his lost son who had returned. However, in verse 25-28 we find a stark change in the story.

Instead of rejoicing at the knowledge of the safe return of his younger brother, the older son becomes angry and refuses to join in the celebration (vs. 28). When the father confronts the elder son we then find the jealousy and indignation of the older brother made manifest. It is at this point the father responds saying “It is right that we should make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.” The parable ends with that final statement from the father to the elder son.

That closing statement shows the purpose of the parable. It was given to convict the Pharisees and scribes of their jealousy and indignation of those who were living sinfully. At this point we find a root of the problem for the Jews. They understood that Jesus came from God (Jn. 3:2), but He did not praise or laud over the self-righteous Pharisees, rather He taught the sinners. They were insulted and acted exactly like the jealous older brother.

We are not exempt from the same temptation of jealousy which beset the Pharisees and the eldest brother. When we hear of others’ spiritual growth or progress do we genuinely rejoice or are we inwardly jealous and condescending? When those of us who have been Christians for years see the joy or dedication of new Christians, do we act jaded or arrogantly dismiss them? Are we truly concerned about the welfare of souls around us or merely focused on whether God notes and repays our good deeds? May we not be like the elder brother, but may we rejoice in the Father’s forgiveness!