Luke 15:25-32; Luke 15:1-7; I. The Stubborn Son II. The Pleading Father

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how do you respond when other people get a gift? What is your normal attitude towards those who receive something that you want or think you deserve? Let’s imagine that you have been working for a raise or promotion- only to have a co-worker receive what you thought you deserved. Or kids- picture that your younger brother cleaned his room and was praised and rewarded for cleaning it- while your room was not dirty thus you did not clean it and you were not praised. Would this action of your parents be unjust? To praise the one who cleaned his room when you were the good child whose room is always clean? Well, this imagined offense is the very topic of the 2nd half of this parable- and is the attitude of the older son. Today we see that Jesus Christ chastens the older son for his lack of joy on the sinner’s repentance. As I said last week, this parable is really about two sons- and both are lost in their own way. The younger son was lost in his sin and rebellion- only to be restored after repentance and return. The older son may have kept up the outer appearance, but his heart is just as hard! Jesus Christ chastens the older son for his lack of joy on the sinner’s repentance.

**I. The Stubborn Son**

As we saw last week, the Father rejoices when the younger son is restored. But as joyful as the father might be, we find quite the contrast to this in the older son. As we found out in v. 11, this man has two sons. Yes, the younger one strays- but the older one, he stubbornly refuses to rejoice and embrace his restored brother. He is the joyless son who views his father as a cruel master. Again, this is a picture of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus day. It was these who were grumbling- murmuring back in 15:2. Sinners were entering into the kingdom- God, the angels and the saints were rejoicing in their repentance- but the religious rulers stubbornly refused to share this excitement. I have no need for mercy- I have always obeyed you- he thinks. But why did he obey? It was not because he loved the father- but rather he was serving for a payment. His heart was still hard- He had no true love for God nor for his brother! Now this older son may be hard working- but his works were not offered in love but rather begrudgingly! And when the news of his brother’s return is told- he responds in anger and refuses to enter the party (v. 28). His sin is evident in his attitude and his actions! So what kind of attitude does he have? Well, it is one of anger and resentment. Instead of joy, he is filled with anger! I deserve better- more than this other son of yours! The Father is not angry- but this son truly is! The fact is, those who reject repentant sinners- the very ones that Jesus welcomes- find themselves out of sync with God! They are despising the very ones that Jesus has embraced! This would be like someone refusing to enter the gates of heaven because of all the forgiven sinners who are already there. Well, if that person is in heaven, I’m not sure I want to go anymore. What pride! What rebellion! We are jealous for our own, perceived rights! He is angry- because someone else was shown kindness! Like Cain, angry that his brother Able was accepted while he was not. His response is very telling in v. 29- I have served- I have slaved for you these many years. Although the younger son was once a slave and was now free- this older son saw himself as a slave and refused to come into the Father’s house. So not only his attitude- but his actions prove the state of his heart. Note also what this older son misses- he misses out on the opportunity to feast and enter into the present joyful context. He misses the party because he is grumpy and holds grudges. But also note, he is missing out on the benefits of the family as a whole. This son is lost as well! He is outside of the house- remains separated from the father and his restored son- and refuses to enter as v. 28 says. He stays in the field when there is a party in the house! We also see his proud heart- and his meritorious motivation! He views himself as a slave and his father as a task master. I have slaved for all these years- and for what? I should have been given so much more- I have earned it! He views his father as a harsh taskmaster. The son sees his relationship to his father as one of law and merit- with no room for love and grace! But the fact is, all that the Father had still belonged to him- as v. 31 says- but this older son was ungrateful and uncaring! You see, the party was for the whole family to enjoy! The Pharisees were welcomed to come and enter into the joy of restored sinners as well. But they refused because God’s gracious dealing with sinners offends them. God’s kindness to others is seen as an attack on their own claims! They would not see their own need- and thus they remained slaves standing in the field. This Father had two son- but both were straying. The one became a slave to be returned home as a son- the other stayed home and remained a slave in his own house. This your son- he says in v. 30- not my brother- or my father’s son. This older son loses not only a brother but has also lost a father. It is a wicked thing to set limits on God’s grace- and to judge who we think is deserving of His grace!

In Jesus day, the good Jews were the ones who never sinned- saying as the rich ruler said- all these commandments I have kept from my youth. Having externalized the Law as the Pharisees did, they measured themselves according to their own ability and found that they were good in their own eyes. God must be pleased with me- I have never left home- I have never disobeyed as v. 29 says. They did not see themselves as sick- and thus did not recognize their need for a Savior! But we can be far from God without actually running away and living in rank sin! So when Jesus came offering salvation by way of repentance- these pharisees were unmoved! We don’t need this! And when others repented and were embraced by Jesus- they were annoyed! Why these sinners were embraced by Jesus they could not understand. What does this look like today? Those raised in the church- who always done what was expected of them- are in particular danger of living like this older son. We see the 10 Commandments as our work- seeking to earn God’s favor by never doing anything wrong. We have always been the good kid- but our hearts were never changed, and we never really loved! We have never fallen into grave sin- but that does not mean that are not sinners! We forget that acceptance into the household of God is not based on what we do! We should see ourselves as sons who delights to obey- and not slaves who are working for a cruel slave owner! When we see the sins of others- our first thought should be- but for the grace of God that would be me! I too am a sinner who needs to be forgiven and embraced by the Father! The fact is- anyone who will enter the kingdom of God must be born again! This applies to the younger and the older- the sinner and the obedient son!

All must see their sin and misery- coming to the Son to find life- and to those who seek- Jesus will find! The imagined offense- the presumption of merited blessings- is a constant threat to the Christian’s heart. Think of the opening parable in Luke 15- imagine that the other 99 sheep would despise the returned lost lamb- that they would grumble when he was restored! The grace others receive in no way robs you of grace! Our human inclination is to grumble against God’s kindness shown to others when we think we deserve more- when we view ourselves as more deserving than others. Instead of grumbling or bemoaning God’s generosity- we must rejoice in His kindness shown to us and to others. If we don’t, we are in danger of missing out on the feast and the joy over those who have been restored! Don’t miss the point- you too need to be welcomed by the Father and brought into the house! In humility and joy, you need to be restored! And the sin warned against is pride- to think that we are better than those that fell! Refusing to rejoice in the restoration of sinners because we think that we do not need God’s grace!

**II. The Pleading Father**

But in this parable, we do not only see the love of the father towards the younger son, but also towards the older son who so stubbornly refuses to come in and enjoy the feast! So the Father leaves the party in order to go out and plead with his other son. Yes, this father has two sons but neither one really understood what it means to be a part of the family. So the Father goes out in v. 28 in order to call, summons, instruct, plead with and encourage. He entreated- even begged- you can come home too! He calls out to his other son- in order to explain the situation and in order to invite this son to come to the feast as well. And again in v. 31- the older son is admonished and even gently rebuked for his unloving and uncaring attitude towards his brother. Please son- this is a good day! Come and celebrate with us! Remember that this rebuke was directed mainly towards the grumbling Pharisees and scribes of v. 2. Jesus is warning then- and us- to be careful in how we view others who we might call sinners- those who have not grown up in the church or those who are not a mature as we think we are. But the good news is this- Jesus not only warns us but welcomes us to come in as well! We not only see that these sinners of v. 1 are welcomed- Jesus desires and graciously calls these Pharisees and scribes- these proud, unloving older sons- these are welcomed and called in as well! The gospel call to repent and believe goes out to all! The younger and the older son- both are invited to come into the house and enjoy the feast! This truly is good news for you and me- for those tempted to see themselves as better than others! We, too are invited- come to feast! Give up your pride and stop criticizing others- stop looking at your own life and stop boasting your own works! Jesus calls you- come in to the house! Repent and believe- come to the Savior now- and you too will be saved! Remember that Jesus is the beloved son who left His Father’s house to go out and search for the lost. To bring the Lost back to His Father’s house! We need to be found and saved by Him- and that truth frees us from joyless slavery!

How should we respond when sinners enter the Kingdom- when the straying repent- when we come to our senses as we repent and believe? Well- as the angels and the saints do- even as the Father does in heaven- so we must rejoice! We must as v. 32 says- celebrate and be glad! “Euphrano and Chairo” in the Greek- Rejoicing and giving thanks- as we found with parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin- the recovery of the lost moves the finder and his friends to engage in great thanksgiving! The Christian life should be one of constant rejoicing- giving thanks to God for all that He has done and especially today- we see that we should rejoice in the gospel bearing fruit in lives of others! Being glad and giving praise! This is good- more than that- this is necessary! Note what the Father says in v. 32- It was fitting- we needed to do this! Joy is the only acceptable response once the straying child comes home! It was necessary- a demanded response! Due to the nature of this event- no other response would fitting! This ought to be done! As rebellious as the younger son was when he left his father’s house- doing what ought not to be done- This older son is just as rebellious- refusing to do what ought to be done!

To conclude, self-righteousness produces joyless slaves! A sense of moral superiority- thinking we deserve kindness while we heartlessly condemn others- is a constant threat to us all. Although the younger son sees his sin and is restored by the father, our passage concludes with an open ending. The other son is still standing in the field in v. 31- will he enter into the joy of restoration? Will he too rejoice in being found by the Faithful Father? Do you know the blessings that belong to you? We must never stop marveling at this fact- I am a child of the king! Remembering our identity as adopted children of the heavenly father helps us to rejoice when others are brought in! So- is joy your attitude today- and whenever you see these blessings or when you hear of sinners being restored? Or is your attitude that of the older son- thinking little of your birthright and seeing yourself as a slave. Jesus Christ chastens the older son for their lack of joy on the sinner’s repentance. May we never view God’s covenant and grace as something we deserve and others do not! Rather may we like Jesus- rejoice to see others being restored! It is necessary and fitting for us to be glad when the lost are found and the dead are brought back to life!