

Sermon Outline - Session 5

The True Elder Brother



Text: Luke 15:1-6, 25-32 NIV

Alternate Title: Everything I Have Is Yours

Introduction: We have been looking at the story traditionally called “The Parable of the Prodigal Son.” We’ve said that you will miss the radical message of the story if you don’t see that it is about two sons—one immoral and “bad”, one very moral and “good”—who are both alienated from the father and therefore spiritually lost. That is a remarkable message. But there is much more—though it too is easy to miss. We must remember that this is the third of three parables, told to the same audience, meant to be pondered all together. What do we learn if we do that? We learn: 1) the cost of reconciliation, 2) that there is a missing elder brother, and 3) that we have a true elder brother.

1. The cost of reconciliation—verses 29-31.

- What did it cost to bring the younger brother home?
 - At first glance, it seems not to have cost anything. There is no punishment—he is just taken in. The father opens his arms, puts new clothes on him, and that’s that. It’s free.
 - Many people have pointed this out and then argued like this: “God in heaven is like this father. He just accepts and forgives anyone who asks. There is no need for the classic Christian doctrine of the atonement. Christians have taught that God cannot simply forgive, that there must be payment for sin—but here we see that reconciliation is completely free.”
 - However, this is a great mistake. The reconciliation is free to the younger brother. But it is very costly for someone else.
- The elder brother is furious with the father for receiving his younger brother back into the family. He alludes to it when he says, “you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But... you kill the fattened calf for him!” The elder brother is angry because of the *cost* of this reconciliation.
 - Remember—the father had given the younger brother his entire legal part of the inheritance. And it was all spent—all gone.
 - Yet now the father is restoring him into the family. He has already put a robe on him, and given him a ring, which was probably the signet ring with which family members ratified contracts. The younger brother’s fair share of the wealth is all gone, but now he is back, and every robe, ring, fattened calf is coming out of someone else’s pocket.
 - Everything the father has, now is legally the elder brother’s. He is the only heir of all the father has left. So every robe, every ring, every fattened calf, every cent of the father’s, is ultimately the elder brother’s. When the father says to the elder brother, “everything I have is yours” (v.31) he is speaking the literal truth.

- So the salvation of the younger son is not free after all. It has already been extremely expensive—look at the feast. And it will be extremely expensive. The father cannot forgive the younger brother, except at the expense of the elder brother. *He* is the one who must bear the cost of the reconciliation.

2. There is a missing elder brother—verses 1-10.

- The elder brother knows all this—that forgiveness and reconciliation is never free. Someone has to pay. Either the younger brother has to come and earn his way back into the family, as he offered to do (see verse 19) or he can come back in immediately, through forgiveness, and then the elder brother will have to bear the cost. Salvation cannot be free. Someone has to pay, either the sinner or his elder brother.
- The elder brother knows this and refuses to do it. So we listen to the story and see the elder brother “being a Pharisee,” and we are saddened. But that is not where Jesus wants our minds and hearts to remain.
- Jesus told his listeners three parables together—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son.
 - In each of the first two parables there is a lost object and someone who goes out, searches for it, and brings it home with joy. The shepherd searches until he finds the lost sheep. The woman searches until she finds the lost coin. So when we get to the parable of this lost son, the listeners fully expect that someone will set out to search for the lost brother and bring him home.
 - To our surprise, no one does. Jesus is leading us to ask, who *should* have gone out to search for this lost boy? And the answer would have been quite clear to 1st century listeners: it *should* have been the elder brother.
 - That was the reason that the oldest son got the lion’s share of the estate. It was his job to sustain the family’s unity and its place in the community. It is the elder brother in the parable who should have said something like this: “Father, my younger brother has been a fool, and now his life is in ruins. But I will go look for him and bring him home. And if the inheritance is gone—as I expect—I’ll bring him back into the family at my expense.”
- Jesus doesn’t put a brother like that into the story. Instead the younger son and the father have to deal with a recalcitrant, resistant, self-righteous elder brother.
- But we don’t. The elder brother in the story is there to make us long for a *true* elder brother, one who, if we go astray, won’t hold it against us but seek us and bring us back at any risk and any cost to himself.

3. We have a true elder brother.

- Think of the kind of elder brother *we* need. We need one who would not just go into a far country, but who would come all the way from heaven to earth to find us. We need one who would not just open his wallet for us, but pour out his life. One who would pay not just a finite cost but an *infinite* debt, to bring us back into God’s family. And we do! It’s Jesus.
- See! When the father says to the elder brother “everything I have is yours” that is literally true of Jesus. Jesus had all God’s glory. He had equal glory with the Father, but he emptied himself (Phil 2:4-10.) He lost it all—for us.
- How do we get the father’s robe? Because Jesus was stripped naked on the cross. How do we get the father’s feast? Because Jesus took the cup of wrath that might have the cup of joy. He is our true elder brother—and he says so. Hebrews 2:11 says, “Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. He says, ‘I will declare your name to my brothers’.”

- Jesus came to earth and truly obeyed his Father and never disobeyed his orders. He truly had the right to all the Father owns. But instead, he came out and searched for us, and found us in the pigsty, and carried us home on his shoulders singing with joy. And he gave us his robe, his ring, his place, his wealth—it is all at his expense.

Good source books:

Bailey, Kenneth. *Finding the Lost Cultural Keys to Luke 15*. Concordia, 1992.

Bock, Darrell L. *Luke 9:51-24:53*. Baker, 1994.

Ellis, E.Earle. *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Luke*. Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1974.

Wilcock, Michael. *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Luke*. IVP, 1979.

Sessions:

Session	Sermon	Book Chapters	DVD	Group Study
ONE - The Parable			Film	✓
TWO - The People Around Jesus	✓	Introduction and Chapter 1	Session Two Clip	✓
THREE - The Two Lost Sons	✓	Chapters 2 and 3	Session Three Clip	✓
FOUR - The Elder Brother	✓	Chapter 4	Session Four Clip	✓
FIVE - The True Elder Brother	✓	Chapter 5	Session Five Clip	✓
SIX - The Feast of the Father	✓	Chapters 6 and 7	Session Six Clip	✓