

**The Bitter Brother of Luke 15:20-32**  
**04-23-17 AM**

The parable of the wasteful / prodigal son is the third of a series of parables Jesus taught that emphasized the love God has for those who are lost. The first parable spoke of sheep that were lost and a shepherd who sought them out; the second of a lost coin and the joy in finding it. The third parable was that of a lost son. What is different in this parable than the other two is the presence of a third participant, the son who remained behind.

In the parable, the older brother remained behind and stayed faithful to his father. He obeyed his commandments and did the work in serving him. When the younger brother returned, the older was angry (because of the celebration), and the father came to him to petition him to join their celebration. There are a number of important things to understand in this interaction. First, we should not say that the older brother was sinful himself, but he had the wrong heart. Second, we ought to understand what the father said to him.

When we consider the position of the older brother, it is not hard to understand why he was angry. First, consider the hurt he must have felt in being left by his brother. Paul describes Demas, a faithful brother in the past, forsaking him for the world in 2 Timothy 4:10. Paul felt this personally (in that he says Demas had forsaken him). So must the older brother have felt. Second, the elder brother bore witness to his father's hurt. Think of how Judah spoke of the hurt his father would feel if Benjamin did not return (Gen. 44:34). The elder brother had to live with a father with a broken heart. Sometimes it is easier to forgive someone for hurting us than it is to forgive someone for hurting those we love. Finally, consider that this left the elder brother to do all the work. In Matthew 20:1-15 and the parable of the workers, remember that the workers who labored all day felt slighted by doing most of the work. The elder brother was even in the field when the celebration began.

We need to understand that sin hurts people. The consequences of our sins hurt others, and we should understand that truth. Sometimes brethren hurt us deeply. But does that give us a place and a right to be angry with our Heavenly Father for forgiving them?

*"Son, you are always with me"* – the father came to the son, not in anger but with gentle pleading. He first points out that this son has the blessing of being with the Father. He did not suffer the consequences of sin as his other son had. We should not be deceived, while it may seem that people enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, in the end it causes great hurt. Those who live in sin are without hope (Ephesians 2:12) and an enemy of God (James 4:4). They deserve our pity rather than our disdain.

*"All that I have is yours"* – the father reminded him that he shared all of his possessions. We need to consider the blessing of having our Father's possessions. He shares with us an eternal hope (Colossians 1:5) and an access to the Father by prayer (John 16:23).

*"We have to celebrate and rejoice"* – the father said that it is necessary (for the sake of what is right) to rejoice when the lost return. This means we need to have the mind of God towards sinners. We need to be desperately seeking their return (think like Paul in Romans 9:2-3). We need to rejoice when they return (Luke 15:10) and we need to demonstrate our love when they return (2 Corinthians 2:1-8).

Our love for sinners needs to follow the Father. As with the Father, we cannot pursue them into sin, but we must rejoice and embrace them on their return. We need to be aware of the danger of becoming bitter; it is easy to become bitter against those who injure us. Bitterness has a dangerous result:

*Hebrews 12:14-15 Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled*