

## **Luke 15:11-32**

### **“The Older Brother and the Younger Brother”**

I am the eldest of two siblings. I have a younger sister who is two years younger than me. I think I behaved as a good child to my parents. I feel that my sister was a smart and shrewd woman who, from my point of view, was able to get around and communicate with others better than I could. Seeing my sister like that, I sometimes envied her. Today's scripture, Luke 15:11-32, is one of Jesus' parables. Through the story of the brothers in this parable, I would like for us to see what God is like and how we should approach Him.

Today's passage is Luke 15:11-32.

<sup>11</sup> And he said, "There was a man who had two sons.

<sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup> Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.

<sup>14</sup> And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

<sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

<sup>16</sup> And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!

<sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

<sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

<sup>20</sup> And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw

him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

<sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

<sup>23</sup> And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

<sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

<sup>26</sup> And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

<sup>27</sup> And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'

<sup>28</sup> But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,

<sup>29</sup> but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.

<sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

<sup>31</sup> And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

<sup>32</sup> It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

These are the words of the living God. Amen.

We will look at two points from this passage. The first is that the younger brother received the Father's love and blessing. Why did he receive these from the Father? Secondly, even though the older brother had his father's love, he rejected it. Why did he reject it?

First, the younger brother received the love of the Father and was blessed. Why did he receive his father's love, and why was he blessed?

This story of the two brothers is not a true story, but a parable told by Jesus. In verse 1 of the previous chapter, chapter 14, Jesus was invited into the home of a Pharisee for a Sabbath meal. In Israelite culture, inviting people to celebrate and eat on the Sabbath (from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday) indicated an intimate relationship. However, the reason the Pharisee invited Jesus into his home at this time seems to have been to find out what kind of person he was and to accuse him. The hosts, the Pharisees and the Scribes, complained, "This man is receiving sinners and eating with them." It was then that Jesus told them this parable of the elder brother and the younger brother.

Look at verses 11 and 12.

<sup>11</sup> And he said, "There was a man who had two sons.

<sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

Jesus' parable must have been a surprise to those who heard it. The parable is about a father who had two sons. The younger brother, the second of the sons, said, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' Receiving property from one's father or inheritance from one's father is done when the father is dead. Therefore, the younger brother's request to his father was disrespectful to his father's authority. But to this

disrespectful son, the father, surprisingly enough, gave the younger brother the property that was intended as a gift only after the father's death.

<sup>13</sup> *Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.*

The younger brother packed his belongings and left for a distant land. When an inheritance is acquired, the will or other document should state how the predecessor wants the inheritance to be used, etc., and the wishes of the predecessor should be respected. However, the younger brother treated his father as if his father were dead, and spent the money and property inherited from his father like hot water without regard for his father's wishes. Incidentally, "spend like hot water" is a Japanese expression. The original meaning of the word is to throw away, to drown oneself in alcohol, women, etc. In recent financial terms, the word "melt" would be used. The money was spent in full, with nothing remaining.

<sup>14</sup> *And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.*

<sup>15</sup> *So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.*

<sup>16</sup> *And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.*

The younger brother, after spending his father's inheritance, sold his own possessions and other things to make ends meet. However, a severe famine swept across the land. He went to live with a Gentile family, but they sent him to the fields to tend to their pigs. The Israelites considered pigs unclean animals and would not eat them, much less care for them. The fact that he had to take care of the pigs indicated that he had fallen into a state of utter despair. He had nothing to eat, and he even wanted to eat the bean pods that were fed to the pigs. No one gave him anything. Incidentally, "inagomame" (the bean pods) is now called carob, which is sweet and nutritious, but at that time it was used to feed livestock.

<sup>17</sup> *"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!*

<sup>18</sup> *I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.*

<sup>19</sup> *I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"*

The younger brother separated himself from his father, despised him, and lived selfishly the way he wanted to live. He had spent all he had been given, and had fallen to the point where he had no food or shelter. It was then that he "came to himself," that is, he remembered. While at his father's house, he saw his father's many employees eating. He remembered that the food was plentiful. But as a result of separating himself from his father, he was now starving to death. He was determined to return home, to his father.

However, the younger brother had originally treated his father as if he were dead. He had treated him with contempt by taking half of his father's property, leaving him, and spending it all. Therefore, the younger brother decided to say that he was no longer entitled to be called a son, that he wanted to return to his father's house as one of the hired hands, and that he wanted to obtain forgiveness for the sins he had committed against his father.

<sup>20</sup> *And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw*

*him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.*

<sup>21</sup> *And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

The younger son went to his father, but his father reacted in a completely different way than he expected. As soon as his father saw him, he felt compassion for his son. The word "compassion" means "a feeling of having one's insides ripped out." The father ran to his son. In those days in Israel, it was considered shameful for a man of dignity to run. This shows what the father thought of his younger son.

<sup>21</sup> *And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

<sup>22</sup> *But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.'*

The younger brother spoke these words to his father in an attempt to obtain forgiveness. But before the younger brother could express his desire that he be treated like a hired hand, the father turned to his servant and said,

<sup>22</sup> *... 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.'*

<sup>23</sup> *And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.*

<sup>24</sup> *For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'* And they began to celebrate.

Even though his son, had spent the father's inheritance like hot water and despised his father, the father did not treat his son like a hired hand. Without a pause, he had them put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. The father saw his son as his own, as a child by right. Then the father brought a fattened calf, slaughtered it, and held a feast. The father exclaimed, "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

Why was this son given such a blessing from his father? He had devoured his father's wealth and then fell into a state of despair. He did repent and return to his father. But more importantly, the father is rejoicing that his son, who was dead, has come back to life! His son, who was lost was found! At the same time, the father felt deep compassion

for his son when he saw him return in such a desperate state. He felt as if his insides were being ripped out of him. Because of the father's deep compassion and love, he blessed his son and welcomed him back as his own child, even though he had disobeyed the father and used up all of his assets. What inexpressible love and compassion of the father!

I was out shopping with my wife recently when I dropped my gloves. These gloves were very important to me. My wife had bought these gloves for me when I had lost a previous pair when I was single. When I lost the gloves, I was very upset. And because my wife had bought them for me, I treasured them. I was really discouraged and anxious when I lost them. I was ready to give up ever finding them, but then the next day I got a call from the store where I had been shopping. They had found the lost gloves! I put all my other work aside and went to pick them up. I was so happy when I got them back. If God cares this much about the precious things we have lost, we can be sure that he will have much more joy if we, who have been separated from Him, return to Him. He will have compassion on us. God the Father will rejoice and show compassion to those who are lost, separated from him, if they return to Him.

Beloved, the younger brother received the greatest blessing when he returned to his father. Because God our Heavenly Father is so much more loving than we can imagine, He grieves over the fact that we sinners are suffering from sin. He has compassion. He welcomes, and rejoices over those who seek to return to Him. Let us then repent daily of our sins of disobedience to Him and turn toward His presence.

Thus, the younger brother received the blessing from the Father. The older brother, however, despite his father's love for him, refused to join the celebration. Why did he refuse?

<sup>25</sup> *"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.*

When the younger brother returned and the father began the feast, the older son was in the field. We know that he was working in his father's fields, entrusted with the management of the fields. When he finished his work and approached the house, he heard the sounds of music and dancing.

<sup>26</sup> *And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.*

<sup>27</sup> *And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'*

The older brother called one of his servants and asked him what was going on. He was told that his brother was alive and had returned home, and that his father had slaughtered a fattened calf and made a feast for him and was giving him a banquet.

<sup>28</sup> *But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,*

The older brother was not happy that his younger brother, his immediate family, had returned. Rather, the older brother was angry. We read that he did not even try to enter the house. This is an indication that he really did not want anything to do with his brother. Seeing his angry son, the father came out of the house to calm him down. However, to his father's attempt to appease him, the older brother replied,

<sup>29</sup> . . . *'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.*

<sup>30</sup> *But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'*

In verse 29, the attitude of the older brother's heart toward his father and toward his younger brother is revealed. First, the older brother says to his father, "Look!" It is actually an imperative. "Look!" is not the kind of language that shows respect for the father. It seems that the older brother was angry with his brother and his father as well. The older brother had served by his father's side and lived by his father's commandments. However, the older brother is angry with his father for not rewarding him for his service and obedience. He also looked down on his younger brother as a man who had left his father's presence, drowned himself in prostitutes, and devoured his father's wealth. The older brother, however, could not stand the fact that the father had shown such love to his younger brother and had slaughtered a fattened calf for him. He became angry. But the father responds to his older son,

<sup>31</sup> . . . *'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.*

<sup>32</sup> *It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'*

The father, seeking to soothe his son's anger, said to him, "Son." He declared that his son was always with him, and that everything that belonged to the father, belonged to his son—the older brother. But the father explained why he had shown love to the younger brother who had been prodigal with his wealth. He said that it was natural for him to rejoice and celebrate because this son had been dead, but had come back to life, was lost and had been found.

The father's attitude toward the older brother and the younger brother was consistent. Both the older brother and the younger brother were children of this father. The father loved them both. The younger brother fell away from the father, but repented of his sins and received forgiveness from the father. But what about the older brother? He had been in the father's presence for a long time. But this was not because he loved his father. The reason he stayed and served his father was because he wanted to gain his father's approval and wealth by serving his father without breaking his commandments. He could not rejoice with his father over the return of his brother, whom he thought was dead. Rather, he was angry and would not even enter the house. The older brother

rejected the love of his father in spite of his father's love for him. He was even more distant from his father than his younger brother had been!

What is Jesus saying through this parable of the brothers? When he told this parable, he was speaking of those who were called tax collectors and sinners, and of the Pharisees. The Pharisees were zealous to keep the law and the traditions of their fathers. They did not want anything to do with the tax collectors and sinners who were present, and even looked down on them. But Jesus is saying through this parable that sinners, tax collectors, and Pharisees are all sinners who have turned away from God and need forgiveness of their sins and salvation in Jesus Christ.

I was in the same situation as the older brother. And I must confess that I still have struggles. By the grace and mercy of the Lord, I was led to his work here at Grace City Church Tokyo. However, as I continued to serve, I realized that my purpose had shifted from expressing God's greatness, to gaining approval from people and receiving recognition from the work I did. When I realized that I was not getting what I wanted, I became angry and frustrated. There seems to be a tendency in my mind to work for my own approval, away from God's love, especially when I become stressed in my work.

The Father's love was poured out to the older brother, as well. But the older brother did not love the Father and was far from the Father's love. We, too, have heard the parable of the older brother, and we too have learned that everyone, no matter who he or she is, is sinful before God and needs to be saved. We must listen to the parable of the older brother and see that everyone is sinful before God and in need of Jesus' mercy and salvation. Let us honestly come before Jesus and receive grace from the Lord, humbly acknowledging the fact that we can do nothing without God's help.

Both the younger brother and the older brother were separated from the father. The father had compassion and love for both of them. And Jesus, who told this parable, also loved us, even though we had turned away from God. He died on the cross for us, sinners who had been separated from God, and took upon Himself the punishment for our sins that we deserved, atoning for our sins and offering us forgiveness. Let us go to Him, thankful and rejoicing in His amazing mercy, love, and grace. He welcomes us as His children.

Let's pray.

"We praise Your precious name, beloved God. Lord, we have been like these brothers. We have lived apart from your love and against you. But we thank you that you receive us into your presence with compassion and love. We confess our sins before You, O Lord, and ask You to receive us as Your children, repenting of our sins against You. You loved us to the point of crucifying Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. We ask that day by day we may know the depth of your love and mercy and be transformed to love you.

We offer this prayer before you in the name of our beloved Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

