

The DAILY JESUS NEWS #210

Jesus' Ministry in Perea Jesus' Parable of the Lost Older Son LK 15.25-32

25 "Meanwhile, the older son was working in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was happening.

27 "Your brother has returned," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound."

28 "The older brother became angry and adamantly refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father,

"Look! All these long years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

31 "My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	Somewhere in Perea
Timeline	January or February (Months 36 & 37)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage VII: Jesus' Ministry in Perea
	A. Jesus' Ministers Throughout Perea
Title	9. Jesus' Parable of the Lost Older Brother

COMMENT:

Jesus' third parable is usually called "the Prodigal Son," as if it is about the younger son. The truth is that Jesus actually told it to highlight the older brother. Jesus told these three parables to confront and correct the wrong attitude of the Pharisees, who are represented in the parable by the older brother.

Jesus spun out these parables because the Pharisees were complaining that he welcomed "sinful people" like the younger brother. All three parables described the necessity of joy and celebration on God's part (and the angels) in "finding" and re-connecting with sinful people who were repentant. The father in the this third parable was the ultimate expression of God's joyful attitude in welcoming home the sinful sons and daughters that he loves so much.

The older brother illustrated the Pharisee's attitude, which was opposite of God's. The brother was angry that the prodigal son merited a huge party, but he did not. It just was not fair. He had slaved away at home for his father for all these many years, outwardly obedient but inwardly seething with anger and frustration, and he seemingly got nothing back in return.

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The younger son realized that because of the goodness of his father, even the hired hands at home had a much better life than he did apart from his father. On the other hand, the older brother thought that life at home with his father was worse than living as his slave.

The father treasured non-stop fellowship with his older son. **"My son, you are always with me."** He delighted in constantly making all of his riches available to the older brother to use as his own. **"Everything I have is yours."** But this meant nothing to the older brother because he was dead to a love-relationship with his father, even though he was living at home in outward obedience.

The older brother was just as lost and dead to his Dad while living at home as the younger brother was when he went far away to waste his inheritance. Both brothers were equally separated from their father in their hearts; they just expressed their lostness in different ways. The younger son came to his senses and realized how good and loving his father really was. The older brother still had not come to his senses, because he did not know his father at all. He was truly lost, and as dead to his dad as a stone-cold grave.

Jesus shocked the Pharisees by telling these three parables to confront them with their own lostness and alienation from God, clothed in the guise of obeying and serving him so faithfully. He was also offering God's love and warm welcome to them, if they would come to their senses like the younger brother, and repent.

Like the older brother, the Pharisees were far too self-righteous to see any need for that, and they would have nothing to do with God's joy in welcoming them into real fellowship. They kept their heart-distance from him at all costs.

Prodigal children are easy to recognize in their lost condition. Older brothers are much more subtle and expert in hiding their alienation from God. They are usually religious people who take pride in doing all the right things to maintain their self-righteousness. Unfortunately, they are just as lost in their sin, and dead to God in their pride as any prodigal. The only difference is that they have not recognized their alienation from God yet. Their condition is therefore far worse than a prodigal who recognizes their sinfulness and acknowledges it for what it is.

APPLICATION:

The "older brother" kind of alienation from God is more common than the "younger brother" version.

Do you tend toward the "older brother" or "younger brother" expression of distance from God? You can often tell by the people you tend to hang out with. Are they "younger" or "older" brother types?

What form of repentance is most appropriate to your own sinful patterns toward God? How are you rejoicing with God in expressing it?