

**Context**

Verse 10: *Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

Summary

The parable describes how a son demanded his inheritance early, but the elder son was content to stay working in the estate. The younger son took the money, and went off partying and having what he thought was a great time squandering the money on a wild lifestyle. When the money ran out, so did the fun. Being broke he became desperate when a famine fell on the land. Driven to eating the food meant for pigs, he reconsidered his position, and knew he had to get back home again to his father, where was safety. The elder son was not too happy seeing the fuss made of this wayward brother, and felt

his loyalty was not appreciated. The father explained the over-riding matter was salvation for all, not hierarchy or promotion.

Certain man

The certain man, is so described to invite the question, - who is he? This will become clear as we go through the parable. The Lord Jesus expected his listeners to work out the meaning. We notice the context. Previously Jesus was speaking to the Scribes and Pharisees who criticised Jesus sitting down and eating with sinners. What they meant by this was that certain classes in Judea were regarded as unclean and outside of salvation because they had fallen, had been harlots, or were tax collectors, or did not attend the temple services, or did not go along with the teachings, rituals and traditions of the religious classes, and so were regarded as “sinners”. The Scribes who regarded themselves as experts in the Law of Moses, and the Pharisees who saw themselves as pure and holy in God’s eyes, loyal to the Law of Moses, and keeping the traditions of the Rabbis, they were outraged, annoyed and bitter, that this obviously clever Preacher from Galilee called Jesus of Nazareth was giving this class of people such attention, and spending so much time in their houses, even teaching them and eating with them, they didn’t deserve that, and surely it was unclean! The Lord Jesus in the early part of this chapter replies with various parables – the lost sheep, and the lost piece of silver, and the amount of effort that went into the restoration of that lost sheep or silver, and then as the moral of the story: verse 7: *joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance* and verse 10: *there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

Two sons and inheritance

Using the context, these two sons equate to the two classes of people mentioned in the previous verses. Both were legitimate heirs

– of the seed of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, from the same household. But one was Israel after the flesh, the other Israel after the Spirit. But one class the elder, was held in society in a higher regard, believing they had a greater right as the elder to the inheritance. This class who liked to be known as Elders, Rabbis, Teachers and Holy men etc... They dutifully attended to the “estate” of the law of Moses, they strongly believed that works would save them, carefully attending to all the rules, they were sure of the inheritance.

Younger son

The younger son did not appreciate the true value of the inheritance, through lack of knowledge, but was one who wanted experience, and did not want to rely on Rules. Sadly this son went to a far country. Far removed from his Father’s House in more than one sense. Not speaking geographically necessary, but in the parable, in the sense of doctrine, principle, moral and ethic. The culture, way of life and behaviour far removed from the standards which underpinned the very foundations of the Father’s House. His situation was vulnerable as he was without guidance. His circumstance worsened step by step.

1. Quickly departed far away from original secure position
2. wasted his substance on riotous living, wild lifestyle *the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life*, led by the flesh and not the Spirit
3. Having no recourse to any spiritual guidance being morally bankrupt could not survive as a famine arose – the famine spoken of in Amos 8:11 *not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord:*
4. Joined himself to a citizen of the far country – in opposition now to being a citizen of the heavenly country (Phil 3:20) and was an alien to the citizens of Israel *having no hope and without God in the world* (Eph 2:12)
5. His job was to feed the pigs. The pigs, the citizens of the Gentile world are often happy to be fed by people with a little

knowledge of God, as it makes them feel good for a few seconds as they snort, scoff and rummage their snouts in the troughs of debauchery

6. He was so tempted to eat the carob pods (see orig.) (fallen bean like pods from the carob tree, dead fruit, cheap, readily available animal food, but occasionally eaten by those in extreme poverty) there was nothing else. Fallen so low, diet was the basest, depressing with minimal nourishment for the brain.

But when so low, and seeing that death is the certain end, with just pigs for company, who would even turn and rend him (Matthew 7:6) to eat... His thoughts finally turned to his Fathers House

That far away place, so clean, elevated, so pure and steady, just a dream to him it seemed.

But the recognition of the Two States was a hammer blow to the mind. Not just a theory, but a reality. He had tasted death himself.

Dead fruit. No future. Or Father's House, an estate with Bread of Life in abundance?

The Lord Jesus in his ever perceptive and accurate depiction of the human condition (seeing he bore all our infirmities) added the words

...when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

When he came to himself. He had lost himself. His self had gone. He belonged to others, the diabolos, the satanos, the earthly sensual and devilish. His self had once been rooted in the Word of God. But had become buried by the filth of the pigs. It was only when there was nothing left to hide his self, that he saw his self for what it really was. Worthless, Hopeless, Pointless.

But the answer was blindingly obvious. He had to retrace his steps. He did so without hesitation, and with conviction. Purpose was now

in himself. Self realisation – he had found himself. He was lost, but he had found himself.

He determined within himself: *I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.*

Sinned against heaven – therein lies the teaching of Jesus – all sin is against God, and Him first – always. It takes an honest man to remember that, and one who acknowledges the omnipresence of God – even when living among pigs – God sees. He knows.

No more worthy to be a son – true humility, the recognition that inheritance is not to be demanded, or expected. It is a gift, and not by right. Not by works but by grace. He had demanded and received, and lost it all, and nearly been consumed by the pigs. But he could be a servant and try to pay back if he could in some small way what he had wasted.

He had been found, that admission to himself, was heard. He was the lost sheep, the lost silver coin. But he had been located, because of his own realisation. That cannot be forced, or pretended.

The sinners, the harlots, the tax collectors who knew their future was hopeless, their standing in society was worthless and their existence pointless, when they got the point and worth of Jesus Word, that hope filled their hearts, and their conviction was absolute compared to the pretensions and rituals of the Elders.

The certain man

He arose and came to his Dad. His Father. The One who was always there for him, and still was. *But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him.* Of course He did. He knew when that thought came into his boy's mind. The Almighty *Father knows the thoughts and*

intents of the heart. It is true, that it is sin which separates. So that a vast space can develop, the enmity between. But when there is repentance, the loving arms of the Father catch and carry and protect and bring back into the warm embrace of the Divine Family.

He came back, he returned back to the house, the house which was founded upon the stability, rules, but above all Love.

John 14:21: He that hath my commandments, and keeps them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him

Because of this, the certain man, the Father had compassion, and clearly forgave the young man, who protested so, that he was only worthy to be a servant, that he had sinned, and had no right to call himself a son.

This is exactly the position of every soul, every self! Each person whether they are Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor, experienced in Scripture or a novice is a sinner, and has no right to claim the inheritance, and maybe just maybe, is able to be a unprofitable (Luke 17:10) servant in the Household of God. It is the compassion of the Father and His prerogative whether we are blessed in any further way.

Older son

In the parable the rejoicing of the Father, and the grand gestures made to the repentant son who had newly arrived, all the song and dance alerted the Elder son, who was out in the estate tending to the Rules, the fields, and ever busy as usual. He came and stood amazed, there was that younger wayward brother of his with a ring on his hand, best robe, and all were feasting and celebrating, the prize bull slain for the special occasion!

So the Elders, Scribes and Jews were angry with Jesus, as they saw the sinners, the harlots and the publicans feasting with Jesus, the

crowds looking on, surely such acclamation such worship should be for them? Had they not been so careful and meticulous with the Law of Moses? Had they not revered the scrolls of the book, and given so much gold to the temple? Why, they never socialised with the rough and ready outside the city gates, or stopped so low to mix with unclean lepers, why were they not appreciated and feted by the crowds, surely the inheritance belonged to them, theirs was Jerusalem, theirs was the Kingdom of God. Surely! ?

So the Elder Son became angry and bitter in his heart, answering his father, *Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.*

This reaction is understandable. But sadly reveals the elder son behaved out of duty and not out of love, he reveals a lack of compassion, because his behaviour was mechanical not from the heart. He had not come to himself, and learned the true value and nature of his Father's House. There was a lesson required for him as well. The spirit of grace and supplications, the need of humiliation of that elder son was and is required.

So the Father has promised the Israel of the flesh that God will not leave or forsake them, that all Israel will be saved (Romans 11:26) and the promises to them will be surely fulfilled

Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. But that they must understand *that blindness in part happened to them so the fulness of the Gentiles, those living among the pigs, could come in.* (Romans 11:25)

Brothers and sisters, we must be grateful the fatted calf has been offered for our sakes, we were lost, we have been found. We were dead, but in Christ are made alive.

Brother Terry