

What is the older son Angry?

Read Luke 15:11-32

Message based on Luke 15:28a "But he was angry and refused to go in"

In the first part of the parable, we read about the younger son who acted very wickedly toward his father - he demanded his inheritance and then he proceeded to squander it on wild living. He became desperately poor and suffered much. Then he "came to himself", was humbled, and returned home asking to be received back no longer as a son but as a servant, just so long as he might enjoy being part of this blessed household.

This is just the way that people were broken through the preaching of John the baptist – they came to Jesus begging to enjoy some of the blessing of being connected to the KOG. These are the people whom Jesus welcomed – like many of the tax collectors and other sinners in the land.

The second part of the parable is the part we're interested in now: the older son. While the younger son in the parable corresponds to the tax collectors and the sinners whom Jesus welcomed, the older son corresponds to another group in Jesus day. We'll see whom.

Here's the story. The father is overjoyed to have the son he had loved so much, return humbled by his experiences, asking to be restored to the family. All the pain this young man had caused him, was immediately forgotten. He was so full of joy to have his son back that he threw a party. It was like receiving a loved one back from the dead.

All this happened without the older son's knowledge. He had been working in the field. He was a hard worker – he kept working till the job was done or till late trying. As he returns from a hard day's work, he looks forward to washing up, relaxing, eating, maybe even talk with someone for a bit and then release into beautiful, healing sleep - the reward for hard labour.

As he draws closer to home, he can hear music, happy voices and people are dancing. He is confused. *What's this? There's a party at home and I wasn't informed?*

The servant replies, rather encouragingly I think, "Your brother has come and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has found him back safe and sound." Clearly the servants are excited too. They are happy to have their former master home again. And they expect the older brother to be as happy as the father – they call him *your brother* and they seem excited that he is *safe and sound*.

The older brother is not happy. Instead, he is angry and refuses to go in to the party. Why is he angry? Well, its just the same reaction that we read in verse 2. The pharisees and scribes grumbled against Jesus because he received sinners and tax collectors. So this brother is angry that his father receives this sinner. He has excommunicated his brother. He will not regard him as part of the family. He is a sinner who deserves nothing – to be thrown out on his ear.

So he refused to go in. The father went out to persuade his son to join them, but he is adamant. He does not respond to grace. It does not make him happy that such kindness is shown to another. He

might be the loyal son, but he is not like his father. His reaction to the return of his younger brother is the opposite of his father. He becomes very selfish – *why couldn't I have as much fun with my friends as you are having with this son of yours.*

The boy came home saying, "I am not worthy" and the older brother thinks, "That's right. He is not worthy. He should not be here. Father should have not welcomed him. He is still dead to me and I wish he was still dead to father. Why should we pity him? Why should we forgive him? He is a sinner. I'm not. I am a righteous one. He is unworthy but I am worthy. I earned my place in this family. I belong in this family. He doesn't."

The father replies with great wisdom. He does not get angry at his son. He does not rebuke him. He reasons with him. This is what he says:

Everything I have is yours. Don't be jealous when I freely forgive a sinner. You already have everything. You are a full heir of all that I own. I am yours. All I have is yours. That's the way it is with family. That's the way it is with God too. God has shared everything with us. You can say of Yahweh, "He is mine. He is my God. He is my FAther. THAT's what Jesus taught us. It's what Yahweh said to Abraham and to all who are sealed in the covenant: I will be your God and the God of all your descendants.

But, and this is even more amazing, the father says: This young man is my son. He is your family. You may not excommunicate him. He belongs to you because I forgive him. You must too. I'm your God and he is your brother. Now celebrate because you need to give yourself to me and to your brother. The community of God cannot tolerate jealousy, or people who think they are better than others.

The young man came to his senses. We are left wondering if the older son came to his senses. That's all that God wants from you – whoever you are. If you've wandered far away and done things unimaginably offensive, or if you have always been living in the house of God – all God wants from you is to love him and to love his family. Love him for his grace in Jesus Christ and love your brother and your sister whoever that may be, because you are worse than him, you are worse than her.

You are not worthy to be called a son or a daughter by God. But that is his privilege, his glory to call you that. It is now your duty to call God "Father" and his other children, "my family".