

# Sermon Outline

## *Grace or Merit: The Pharisee's Checklist*

Luke 15:1-2, 11-32

May 13, 2007

In this final sermon on the parable of the father and his sons we pause to consider the elder brother in the story, the one who is “at home” and yet, as far away from the Father as his younger brother was far away in that distant country. “Pig pens” can be places of the heart, as much as locations on a map; this pig pen was well hidden under the guise of loyalty and devotion. Religious flesh is always harder to spot and confront than worldly flesh, but it is just as deadly, and doubly dangerous, precisely because of its clever camouflage.

### **I. *The Darkness of Jesus' Day***

- ? The self-righteous religion of the day – Luke 18:9-14
- ? This was also Paul's post-conversion understanding – Philippians 3:1-9
- ? Thus I must conclude that E.P. Sanders (and other NPP scholars) are mistaken when they assert that first century Judaism was not a religion of works, of merit-seeking relationship with Yahweh.
  - The people of Israel did not understand righteousness by faith and sought to establish their own (Romans 10:3-4)
  - The teachers of Israel did not understand righteousness by faith – and hence mercy!
  - The teachers of Israel did not understand the new birth (John 3)
  - The teachers of Israel did not recognize their Messiah
  - Thinking themselves sons of Abraham, they were actually, said Jesus, “sons of the devil” (John 8).
  - Isaiah plainly prophesied of this blindness and it is inconceivable to me that Pauline scholars – who know Paul's dependence on Isaiah – fail to note this.
  - This blindness is due to idolatry and is manifested in the demonization of Israel and her synagogues at the time, both in terms of sickness that needed healing and possessed people who needed liberating.

### **II. *The Darkness of the Elder Brother***

- ? A final point needs to be made from the Old Testament, a point well known to the Pharisees: the older serves the younger. In the story of God's grace to Israel, God sovereignly elects the younger son to rule the elder – Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over his brothers, Benjamin over Reuben. It is the younger son who is being given mercy, something Jesus' audience would have understood. But here is the rebuke – “You,” he says to the Pharisees, “are the older brother. You who thought you were chosen have not realized something that God is doing – bringing lost sons to himself; namely, the lost sheep of the House of Israel, and, later, even the Gentiles who really do live in a distant country.”
- A. Anger with Mercy (The Jonah syndrome) – Luke 15:28a
- B. Anguish at Joy – Luke 15:28b
- C. Antipathy to the Father – Luke 15:29
  - ? He saw himself as more slave than son.
  - ? He had a theology of merit – I've earned it and you are holding out. But that is demonic, straight from the pit. It smells like smoke.
- D. Alienation from his Brother – Luke 15:30
  - ? All of this is the manifestation of dead religion, of meritorious labor. In Greek the root of the word “Grace” is “Joy.” Show me a house of joy and there you will find grace. But Joy and Resentment cannot co-exist, legalism and partying cannot stay in the same house. In this case, misery hates company.

### III. *The Light of THE Elder Brother* – Luke 15:31-32

There is no “happy ending” to the story Jesus tells. We are left with the words of a father to his son, words that describe the joy of welcoming home the prodigals to the Father’s House. A few weeks ago I reminded you that the true prodigal son – the one who left the Father’s house for a distant country and gave away his honor, and died in the pig pen – was Christ, and by his resurrection from the dead and return to the Father the way home for all is made clear. In the same way, the real “elder brother” is also Christ. He is our “elder brother” (Romans 8:29; Hebrews 2:11-12, 17). Jesus is the faithful son who has by his sacrificial love manifested the life of the Father. He is the true elder brother, the redeemer kinsmen, who saves his younger, powerless, shameful siblings. God did not leave his errant sons without an elder brother who saves. Think then of all he suffered – do we then have room to complain, to be resentful? Think of the mercy he has given us – do we then have a right to withhold mercy and maintain a joyless existence?

Angry when others are forgiven?

Anguished when others rejoice?

Antagonistic to the Father who loves?

Allergic to your forgiven brothers?

This is the Pharisee’s Check List. God desires sons, not slaves, celebration not resentment, and all of it flows from knowing how rich in GRACE God has been to you. If the shoe fits, throw it away.