

## **Message Summary**

For our sermon this week we are able to step back from the normal perspective that many take with the younger son in view, and center our attention on the older brother instead. The younger brother's sins, as we saw last week, were very visible and detestable to anyone who would take the time to look, but with the older brother, his sins are not so visible. The older brother was a hardworking, punctual, responsible and seemingly mature young man. What sins could he possibly be hiding?

The story goes that when the younger brother returned home from his life of sin and shame, the Father restored him back to his place as son. The next scene is that of the Father's house throwing a huge party for the younger brother which drew in the older brother's attention from the field. The older brother was very confused as to what was happening and inquired from one of the hired hands about what was going on. The elder brother was told that his younger brother had come home! And the party was for him! They had even been ordered by the Father to kill the fatted calf for a feast in the younger brother's honor! This angered the elder brother, since he knew of the shame that the sinful lifestyle his sibling had participated in and had brought reproach upon their household name. The elder brother then refuses to have anything to do with the celebration and instead of rejoicing over his younger brother's repentance, he sat angrily outside thinking only of himself.

The next scene is that of the Father coming out after the elder brother just as he had with the younger brother just a few moments ago. The gracious Father pleaded with the elder brother to return home and enjoy the blessings of his restored sibling. The elder brother could only answer in anger and jealousy saying "why haven't I ever been given a party like this", and "why does he get a celebration when I have always obeyed you?" the Father replied saying that "you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." The Father desperately desired both of his boys to rejoice with him at the restoration of their lost family member, but the sin of religious pride had blinded the mind of the elder brother and was keeping him from the joy of his Father's house.

## **WHY IT MATTERS**

### *Digging Deeper*

We must keep in mind that the danger of internal religious pride is just as deadly (if not more so) as the external sins of rebellion. Both of these sinful lifestyles are after the same thing. They both desire to work in such a way as to acquire for themselves their own way without heart submission to the goodness of God. Rebellion seeks its own by externally rejecting discipline and boundaries which God has given for our good, while religious pride seeks its own by keeping all the rules in order to be exalted by others and thereby gaining glory for itself. Both irreligion and religion are seeking glory that is only due to our God, and as long as we seek it for ourselves, we will never get to enjoy the grace that God has given us which is the fountain head of true and everlasting joy!

The main point of this story is really centered on the elder brother much more so than that of the younger. For in Jesus' day, many more people in Jerusalem suffered from religious pride much more than outward rebellion. For a Jew in Jesus' day, keeping the rules was what knowing God was all about. Never mind any need for a heart change, external conformity would do just fine. This is relevant for us all today because we live in the bible belt of America. Many of us grew up in church and have attended most of our lives. As much as this is a blessing, it is also very dangerous, for we too could be suffering from religious pride and not even know it. Take time and examine yourselves this week asking, "Do I suffer from internal religious pride?" "Do I seek to earn God's favor instead of receiving it by faith?" These are important questions for us as we seek to root out any religious pride that might be tempting us to think we deserve God because of our rich church background or ability to keep the rules.

## **NOW WHAT DO WE DO?**

### *Group Discussion & Application*

*Use the following questions to examine what the sermon and its text mean, to apply the Word to your life, and to guide how you pray. Please note that you don't have to use all of the questions. These are just options (along with the digging deeper section) to help you frame the family/small group discussion.*

1. Who was the audience that Jesus was addressing this parable too?
2. Which brother do you think the audience of Jesus relates more to, the younger or older? Why?
3. What is more deadly to the soul, irreligious rebellion, or religious pride? Why?
4. What happened in the story that caused the religious pride of the elder brother to show itself?
5. What are some of the things that happen in daily life that help us see our religious pride?
6. The gospel is the answer to both the irreligious and religious, but are there elements within the gospel that are applied or emphasized differently for each of these heart postures?
7. Why do so many take this story of the prodigal son and emphasize the younger brother's sins and not the older?
8. Can sins of pride look moral and clean on the outside?
9. Do you prefer a fatted calf or fatted chicken?
10. What made the elder brother mad about his younger sibling's party?
11. Did these boys love the hand of the Father (what they could get) or the face of their Father (His character and presence)?
12. What are some practical ways we can keep from the same mistakes of loving God's hand and not His face?
13. If irreligion nor religion grants access into the Father's house, then what does?
14. At the elder brother's angry rebuke, the Father answered saying that all that he has is his, (verse 31). How should this have comforted the elder brother?
15. How should this truth – all that the Father has is ours – give relief to us in our bouts with religious pride?
16. What is so appealing about the religious life, why is it so tempting?

## **Prayer**

- Pray for Our Church:
  - Thank God for showing us through the elder brother the dangers of religious pride.
  - Pray that the Lord would fill CFC with many loving fathers who engage and spend time with their families to the glory of God.
  - Pray that the Lord would use the new Christ Fellowship College class (*How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*) to equip many to know and proclaim the heart of this loving Father.
- Pray for Our Community:
  - Pray that our church would be a place that welcomes lost and rebellious sinners, and pray that many lost and rebellious sinners would come through our doors.
  - Pray that our church would find new ways to reach out to those who struggle with religious pride and graciously lead them into the loving arms of our great Father.
- Pray for Our World:
  - Pray for the Dream Center that it would become a hub for God's love in that community and that we as a church would reach out and make many disciples there for the glory of God.
  - Pray for Jeff and Misti Fairchild as they transition to Honduras. Pray that the Lord would bless their transitions from Gadsden, training and language acquisition in Mexico, and ministry to reach many with the gospel in Honduras.