

The Values of a Believer 28.10.18

(How to avoid the “older brother syndrome”)

Introduction

(Luke 15: 11-32) – Jesus tells the story of a man who has two sons. When the prodigal son returned, his elder brother said to his father: **“Look! All these 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.”** (Luke 15:29).

The story portrays this father as a very wealthy man. One would imagine that such a rich man would host several parties, festivals and celebrations in any given year. He would invite his friends, neighbours and associates, and party for several days and nights. The picture we get is that of a father who was capable of doing this on a regular basis. Surprisingly, the son complains that he had been so faithful and loyal to the father, yet he had never been given even a young goat to celebrate with his friends. **But why?**

There are **three** main reasons why the Father had never given his son even a goat to enjoy with his friends. Let us look at these reasons.

1. The older brother had no relationship with the Father

When he got home and found the party going on, the older son did not feel he was able to confide in his father – no relationship. He called a servant instead and asked him what was going on. He could not confront his father. This reminds me of the story of Esau and Jacob. Esau was the first of the twin boys to be born to Isaac and Rebecca, with Jacob as the younger brother. The birthright naturally belonged to Esau as the firstborn son. In biblical times, **the firstborn son was the one who would receive a double inheritance, and was the one who would inherit his father’s role as head of the family** (Det 21:17). The birthright naturally belonged to Esau as the firstborn son. This entitled Esau to a double-portion of the inheritance, as well as the blessing. As Jacob and Esau grew up, the Bible says ***‘Esau became an expert hunter, an outdoors man; but Jacob was a quiet man who stayed at home.’*** (Gen 25:27). Esau hunted and spent time farming and literally slaving and sweating for the family. **On the other hand, his brother Jacob was a crook** (Gen 27:36). Jacob spent all his time at home, milling around the house, cooking soup and talking to his parents. As a result, his mum, **Rebecca, fell in love with Jacob** (Gen 25:28). One day Esau comes back from the field, exhausted and starving after a full day’s work (Gen 25: 29-32). The first thing he needed as he got home was some food. He finds his brother Jacob preparing some soup. Esau asked for some soup, but Jacob, being the crook that he was, was always looking for an advantage. Jacob comes up with one of the most brilliant business ideas of all time; ***‘first sell me your birthright, then I will give you the soup’*** (Gen 25:31). Esau was too exhausted to think and he screams at Jacob; ***‘what do I care about a birthright when I am dying of hunger, give me the soup’*** (Gen 25:32). This must go into the Guinness Book of Records as one of the worst transactions in the history of commerce. It was like exchanging my son’s toy car (from McDonalds happy meal), in exchange for a brand new Toyota Prado, Landcruiser.

This begs the question:

- Why did Rebecca not think about preparing a meal for her hard working son?
- Why did it not come to Isaac’s mind (in the scorching heat of the Middle East)?

The answer is that there was **NO** relationship. It’s the older brother syndrome.

The bible says ***Esau later sought his birthright back with tears, but he never got it back*** (Heb 12:17).

- **How many times have we traded our birthright for a bowl of soup?**
- How many times have we exchanged your family for a few hours of ecstasy (drugs), etc.
- How many times have we exchanged a Prado for a McDonald’s happy meal toy?
- How many times have we traded the purpose of God, in exchange for a few minutes of pleasure?

Esau, just like the older brother had a wrong value system:

- The Bible says *“What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world but losses his own soul” (Mark 8:36)*. In other words if you take all the gold in the goldfields region around Kalgoorlie, then you add all the iron ore of the Pilbara, and you add all the oil of the Middle East, and all the wealth of Warren Buffet, and you add everything of Bill gates, and top it up with the wealth of Jeff Bizo; then you say *“minus your own soul”*, the Bible says the answer is equal to **NO** profit. *What can anyone give in exchange for their own soul” (Mark 8:37)*. Nothing is worth trading your soul for.
- Paul *“considered everything a loss because of the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord; for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ” (Phil 3:8)*. Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, a son of the tribe of Benjamin, under the law he was perfect. He was one of the best legal brains around, a Lawyer. Yet he says I consider all these things to be manure, dung, rubbish, compared to the greatness of Knowing Jesus. Nothing is worth trading your soul for.
- Moses *“considered it rather better to suffer ill treatment with the people of God, rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin for a season” (Heb 11:25)*. Moses grew up as a son of Pharaoh’s daughter, in line for the throne one day. But he considered it rather better to be a slave with the children of God, rather than to enjoy being a Pharaoh. That is the correct value system of a believer.

2. The older brother showed a level of selfishness

upon discovering that the meal was in honour of his younger brother, he wouldn't even go into the feast. It was just me, me, me and nothing else. The value system needed to be re-aligned with the truth of God. For example, in Matt 20:20-21, Mrs Zebedee (Salome – the mother of James & John) went to Jesus to ask for her sons to be put one on the left, the other on the right of Jesus. I don't think she wanted to do it for Jesus. I think she was thinking of herself and her social standing. She was just thinking about her boys. The ministry of Jesus was much bigger than that. Jesus had to think about the broader picture, the whole Kingdom of God.

3. The older brother did not host the Father’s celebrations

- Always be at your Father’s celebration (worship / prayer / church).
- His father had begun the celebration without him. Not only was he not there as per Jewish custom, he had not been informed about the meal, and even worse, he had not been invited!
- Everyone knew that it was the elder son’s responsibility to play host at a father's banquet as per the Jewish custom of that time.
- **Never allow the busy-ness of this world to distract you from worshipping the Lord**

The ‘older brother/sister syndrome’ was on full display in the story of Mary and Martha in John 12:1-7. Jesus and his disciples were special guests at the house of Simon the Leper. **Martha was slaving** away in the kitchen while Mary her younger sister was sitting at Jesus’ feet. Martha being the elder sister had taken responsibility for serving and looking after the guests. As she sweated and worked her way in the kitchen, the guests were impressed; she was a hard worker and a role model. Meanwhile, her sister Mary was trying to build a relationship with the Lord, breaking a jar of expensive perfume, pouring the perfume over Jesus’ head while anointing and wiping his feet with her hair (**John 12:3**). She used the most glorious part of a woman, her hair, to wipe the dirty and dusty feet of Jesus.

The perfume was worth a year’s wages – expensive (probably equivalent to A\$38k in today’s currency).

Mary is clearly moved by a deep loyalty that ignores the inevitable disapproval that her act will cause. Jesus said Mary had chosen the one thing that can never be taken from her – a relationship with Jesus. **Sometimes**

as Christians, we work so hard that we substitute workmanship for worship. Martha was so busy thinking about what she thought was important that she lost her focus. She had allowed her ministry gift to be a priority over her relationship with the Lord. She did not realise that this was a time to feast on his word, not from her gift. It is not the hard work and the good cooking skills of Martha that Jesus considered to be significant, but the worship of Mary. **It is not the delicious and sumptuous meal that Martha, but the worship of Mary.** Jesus said *“it was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial”*. Jesus was just about to be crucified. So Mary answered the call of heaven and started preparing the body of Christ for burial. Now, that is more valuable than cooking in the kitchen, or giving the money to the poor. We need to set our priorities right, according to our Christian values. The spiritual must come first. Worship must come ahead of slaving away in the kitchen.

4. Keys to avoid the “older brother syndrome”

How to receive “even a young goat”

It is important to work for God, to serve him, to do good work, but first and foremost, it is more important to worship him and to build a personal and intimate relationship with him.

- Mary was in the spiritual, while her “older sister” was in the flesh.
- Mary was in the spiritual, while her “older sister” was in the flesh - values.
(The spiritual must be a priority over the things that gratify the flesh).
- Nothing is worth trading your soul for.
(Never allow your everyday busy-ness to be a priority over your relationship with the Lord)
- ‘God made us to be ‘human beings’ and not ‘human doings’.
(‘older-brother’ Christians are so caught up in ‘doing’ but not in ‘being’ a child of God).
- The father did not want a slave, he wanted a son.
(To live like a King you must work like a prince, not like a slave).
- Do not lose your double portion anointing or blessing through the older brother syndrome.
(This happened in the case of Cain & Abel, Esau & Jacob, Reuben & Joseph, Adonijah & Solomon, Mary & Martha, the prodigal son).

Never lose what you are entitled to as a child of God.