

BIBLICAL STUDIES

Series: *“Men From The Past With A Message For The Present”*

Message: **“THE PRODIGAL BROTHER: ANGER IN ACTION”**

Scripture: **Luke 15:25-32**

Text: ***“He was angry and would not go in.” (Luke 15:28)***

Intro:

Have you noticed that our society is growing more and more angry? Consider the following: one anger management firm stated that “one out of every five Americans has an anger management problem.”

According to FBI statistics, anger is the most common reason for murder and 28% of those crimes occurred as a result of angry arguments in the home. Anger related violence is the reason stated for 25% of divorces. Studies show that 80% of violent children witnessed violence between their parents – either verbal or physical violence.

The phrase "road rage" officially entered the English language in 1997 when it was first listed in the New Words edition of the Oxford English Dictionary. Why do we need a new word? Call it what it is: “Anger!” Benjamin Franklin said, “Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame.”

Well, the story of the older brother in Luke 15 is a good case in point. We usually end the story of the prodigal son with the words “He was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.” But the story does not end there. There is a sequel. The story of the attitude and actions of the older brother is one that is very interesting.

When we first read the story in Luke 15, it appears that the older brother is quite a model son. But now for the rest of the story! Let us look at some of the revelations about anger that we see in the elder brother.

I. THE CURSE OF ANGER.

Anger is a curse because it is so destructive. The acid of anger eats away relationships. Among that which anger destroys in the family, be it a natural family or a spiritual family, are as follows:

A. Anger Destroys Our Happiness.

“He was angry.....” (v.28)

They were having a joyous family reunion because the long lost younger brother had come home after living a wasteful, hedonistic lifestyle in “the far country.” The family was happy – all except the big brother whose anger caused him to be sullen and sulky. His smile is gone, contentment is gone, saintliness of soul is gone – he is not a happy camper!

Illust. After discussing the Sunday School lesson the teacher asked her class of juniors: “Was anyone sad when the prodigal son returned home?” A girl said, “Yes! The fatted calf was sad!”

The girl’s answer had some merit; however, what the teacher was seeking to draw from the class was the regrettable truth that the older son was not happy that his sinful brother’s home-coming was being celebrated.

Notice two words in this story: “*they began to be merry*” and “*he was angry*”. There are two groups of Christians in every congregation. There are the “merry” or “happy” ones and there are the “angry” ones – angry for various reasons - even though, for the most part, the anger is masked with a smile. Unfortunately, it is harder to keep the saints from being angry than it is to make the sinner happy!

Isn’t it true that every angry person you have ever met has lost something? Their happiness is gone – they are grumpy and a grumpy Christian is no commendation of the Good News of Jesus Christ! The Apostle Paul wrote in Gal. 5:22 that “The fruit of the Spirit is *“Joy”* – not anger! Anger destroys our happiness. Furthermore,

B. Anger Destroys Our Usefulness.

“He was angry and would not go in.”

Preparations for a feast were under way – there was much work to be done – the place was teeming with activity – the Father had a smile on his face – Mom was joyfully baking a cake – the calf was being roasted over a fire pit – everybody pitched in - except the big brother and he was scowling, sulking and sad. He turned out to be selfish, jealous and irritable; he pouted and complained, all because he was, at heart, an angry man and consequently was not useful in helping prepare the welcome home meal.

Psychologist Dallas Willard says, “Anger indulged, instead of simply waved off, always has in it an element of arrogance and self-righteousness. Find a person who is angry, and you will find a person with a wounded ego.” Because of anger his happiness and usefulness were destroyed. In addition:

C. Anger Destroys Our Oneness.

“He was angry and would not go in.”

Not “*go in*” where? He would not go in the house with the family. He was part of the family but would not partake with the family. Anger destroys fellowship, unity and the family spirit. Every fracture in Christian fellowship is caused by anger. Anger is a disease that destroys! It destroys happiness, usefulness and oneness. That is the curse of anger!

Think about this: one son left home and sinned, the other stayed home and sinned. Both were sinners! Does either represent you?

Consider another revelation we find in this story and that is not only that anger is a curse but this story reveals some of the causes of anger.

II. THE CAUSE OF ANGER.

In verse 28 we see the effects of the curse of anger and in verses 29 and 30 we have some of the causes of anger. We read: *“But he was angry and would not go in; therefore, his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends’”*.

There are several reasons why he was angry. Among them are the following:

A. He Thought That He Should Be The Center Of Attention.

He suffered from the “Big Brother” syndrome and felt he was entitled to special recognition. In addition, while the younger brother was absent he had been the center of attention. Now that the long lost brother had come home, the spot-light was not on him. This is conspicuous when he speaks to his father. He uses the personal pronoun “I”, “Me” and “My” five times. He was totally self-absorbed, self-centered.

Sometimes church members who have been around for a long time get jealous when a church starts paying attention to new people. That’s the Older Brother Syndrome. There are some people who cannot tolerate someone else being the center of attention.

Another cause of his anger was:

B. He Thought Seniority Equaled Superiority.

“these many years I have been serving...” (v.29)

This boy was a legalist. He felt that he had earned his status in father’s family. He based his standing in the family on his activity not his relationship.

In God’s economy it is not the length of ones service but the love for the Lord Whom we are serving that is more important.

C. He Thought His Work Was Not Appreciated.

“you never gave me a baby goat.”

He became angry when he thought all his busyness was not recognized and rewarded. He was speaking in terms of what he thought he deserved. He moves away from the principle of grace and speaks in terms of law. He forgot that all that we receive is given according to mercy not according to merit.

There are some people who do all right if you are constantly bragging on them. Others faithfully labor behind the scenes whether they are noticed or not. There are some, like this boy, who cannot stand to be unnoticed. And like this boy, they get angry. Anger is the scheme they use to get attention.

D. He Thought He Was Better Than His Brother.

“I never transgressed your commandment at any time” (v.29); “As soon as this your son was come, which has devoured your living with harlots,,,,,” (v.30)

By implication he was saying, "I am better than that other son of yours, I did not do what he did." He had an inflated sense of his own goodness. He represents many church members who haven't sinned against God by running off and going wild. They've been around for a long time warming a pew. But when it comes to really celebrating what God is doing in the lives of others, they don't rejoice because they want all the attention focused upon themselves. This boy had a holier-than-thou attitude.

There are two sinners in this story: The younger son left home and sinned by his ungodly actions and the older son stayed home and sinned by his unholy attitude! You can go to church every Sunday and be a sinner! There are the sins of jealousy, pride, anger, and resentment that are much easier to hide.

A survey of Discipleship Journal readers listed the areas of greatest spiritual failure in their lives, in the order of their prevalence: 1. Materialism; 2. Pride; 3. Self-centeredness; 4. Anger; 5. Bitterness; 6. Sexual lust; 7. Envy. And if you say that you are perfect, you are lying and that is sin #8! Now, the Devil will tell you that you are ok! He does not want us to change for the better - to grow up spiritually. He wants us to act like the older brother.

There is one last consideration in this story. We've seen the curse of anger and some of the causes of anger – now, let's look at the cure for anger:

III. THE CURE FOR ANGER.

The Father now speaks: "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'" (v.31,32)

He reminds his son of three things:

A. *The Father's Presence.*

"Son, you are always with me."

It is easy for the angry person to forget the presence of the Heavenly Father. The awareness of being constantly in the presence of the Lord will correct our attitude and actions!

B. *The Father's Provisions.*

"all I have is yours."

He was saying, "You haven't got a goat, but you have more than that – you've got me and in me you have everything you need."

Instead of us focusing on what we do not have, let us focus on "Who" we do have – we have God and therefore we have all! Dare we look into the face of our Heavenly Father and say, "You are not enough – I want more! Reflecting of the Father's abundant provisions will cure anger.

C. *The Father's Purpose.*

"It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive

again, and was lost and is found.' "

The Older Son had forgotten the reason for the feast – a returned, restored member of the family! Surely, this occasioned a party! This is no time for grumbling, complaining and criticism. This is party time!

And so it is in the work of the church. The heart of God is set on seeking and saving the lost; retrieving and restoring the wandering ones.

There are three parables in Luke chapter 15. One is about the lost sheep, v. 2-7; one about the lost coin, v.8-10 and the one we have been concentrating upon, the lost son in v.11-32. In these parables the Father's purpose is clear. And, if God's purpose is the purpose of our lives there is no room for anger toward others!

It matters not who does the work, who receives the credit, praise or thanks – the main thing is to accomplish the purpose of God in our individual lives and in the church.

CONCLUSION

There are actually three sons in this parable in Luke chapter 15 –

- There's the younger son who ran away and returned;
- There's the older son who was full of bitterness and resentment;
- And then, there's the third son – the Son of God who is telling this story! He left His Father's house to come to far country of planet earth to die for our sins. He wasn't disobedient - He was obedient unto death. Whether you are like the younger son, or the older son, or you haven't even become a part of God's family yet, will you choose the Son of God today as your Savior?

Illust.

I heard an amazing story: There was a wealthy man who had one son, whom he loved dearly. His wife died in childbirth and he never remarried. He was a lover of art and he taught his son to love fine art. Because he was wealthy, he and his son worked to amass a valuable private collection of priceless works of art.

When he was old enough, the son joined the Marines and was sent to Vietnam. He was killed in action and the father's heart was broken. A few months after he buried his only son, a man knocked on his door. He had a large wrapped package in his hands. When the father opened the door he said, "Sir, I knew your son. We were in the same platoon, and he was my best buddy. I'm an amateur artist, so we had many discussions about art. It's not very good, but I painted a portrait of your son from a photograph I took, and I'd like for you to have it."

The man was touched and tried to pay the artist, but he refused any payment. He said, "I painted him because he was my friend." Although the picture wasn't that good, the proud father displayed it in a prominent place.

Several years later, the wealthy man died, and his works of art were to be auctioned off. There was millions of dollars worth of art to be sold. Art dealers crowded the home wanting to

bid on the Van Goghs and the Monets. The soldier-artist was there, as well, but he was too poor to bid.

The lawyer announced to the crowd that before any of the valuable pieces of art were auctioned off, the deceased had left instructions that the portrait of his son must be auctioned off first. The impatient art dealers complained and said “Get on with it. Get that picture out of the way so we can bid on the real art!”

The auctioneer held up the painting and said, “Who’ll you give me \$100 for the picture of the son?” No one replied. Finally, the soldier friend who painted the portrait said, “I’ll give you \$20 for it.” The auctioneer said, “\$20 once, \$20 twice, sold for \$20.” The artist bought back his own painting because he still felt a great fondness for the man’s son.

At that moment, the rich man’s attorney stepped to front and announced to the crowd. “Ladies and gentlemen, there will no more bidding. My client left secret and specific instructions that whoever bought the painting of his son would receive all the other works of art at no additional charge.

So, the gentleman who bought the picture of his son also receives the other pieces of art. To quote the words in his last will and testament, he wrote, ‘Whoever chooses my son, gets it all.’ This concludes the auction.”

God is saying the same thing to us: “Whoever chooses my Son, Jesus Christ, receives it all.” Will you choose Him today?

If you are an older brother Christian, God is saying, “I love you, I’ve always loved you – loosen up and join my party.” Will you ask Him to forgive you for your bad attitude and take away your critical spirit of resentment and bitterness? Can you hear the music? Can you smell the feast? Come on in. Celebrate!

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