



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

LUKE 15

JUNE 2019

Sharing the Father's Joy

When we share the life of God, we find ourselves celebrating what he celebrates. It is an awesome thing to share the life of the Triune God. Jesus made the nature of God clear and real. He is a Father who loves to show his love for his own.

We often reveal that we are either not conscious of our shared life, or that we are still trying to live in a way that will be acceptable to God.

God designed humans to be joyful. That is part of what it means for us to be his image bearers. We are created to enjoy God just as he enjoys himself. It was the intrusion of sin that introduced angst and fear into human life. Still, people long to celebrate—to find something that brings them joy. We celebrate our heritage if it is a good one. We celebrate our wealth if we have it. We celebrate

our accomplishments when we can. We celebrate our morality when we feel righteous. But, the life we share with the Father celebrates what he celebrates.

In Luke 15, we read three stories about rejoicing with a person who has lost something and then had it restored. First, a shepherd has 100 sheep and one has gone astray. Priority is given to find the lost sheep, and when it is found, the whole community rejoices with the shepherd. Second, a woman has 10 coins and one is lost. Again, priority is given to finding it, and when she does, the whole community

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rejoices with her that what was lost is now found. Third, a man had two sons. The younger son chose to dishonor his father by requesting a settlement of the estate, even though the father was still alive. The father obliged and the disrespectful son got one-third of the estate. He left home and tried living independently in a distant land. He made poor choices and combined with a famine in the land, he was reduced to the only work he could find: feeding pigs for a Gentile. He was shamed. He lost any honor and self-respect he might have had.

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He was hungry and afraid of dying. He was broke, but not yet broken. He was still trying to make a deal in order to survive. When I first began preaching youth crusades, I spoke of his repentance beginning in the hog pen. It is true that he came to himself and began to assess his situation, but that is not biblical repentance. He was trying to figure a way to leverage anything

he could to survive. He knew that he had dishonored his father severely. If he went back home, the community would reject and ridicule him. He would be mocked and ostracized from the town. He had done the unthinkable. He had shamed his father by his own selfish independence. But, he couldn't think of any other alternative. His scheme included a speech he would make to his father. He would say what the father wanted to hear and try to work a deal with him—just to survive. It was a risk, but it was his only chance.

Too often, we have turned toward God in desperate situations. We erroneously thought we could negotiate with God. You can't trade with someone who doesn't need anything you have. Both trading partners must have something the other needs or wants. God has everything and we have nothing. God doesn't need an obedient son . . . he has one. He doesn't need our sacrifice . . . he became that. He doesn't need another servant . . . he has plenty. We have nothing to offer. There is no leverage, no transaction, no deal. The father wanted his lost son back. He wanted a son, not a slave or hired man.

For that to happen, the father had to take upon himself the shame and dishonor the son deserved. He did exactly that. He pulled up his robe and ran wildly down Main Street to kiss and welcome his dirty, dishonoring boy. The crowd must have been in jaw-dropping shock. This just wasn't done in an honor-based culture. An honorable father would have stayed back in the house and waited for the boy to pay his dues and come to the back door. Not this father. He took the shame and ridicule upon himself to restore the boy. He put his robe on him. He placed his ring on his hand. He gave him the shoes of a son. He called for a party to celebrate the restoration of what had been lost.

He delights in **restoring the lost, fallen, and undeserving.**

The story is culturally upside down. This is not right. The father is taking the shame. The boy is getting what he could never earn. The father is not buying his scheme. He is unwilling to treat his son like a slave. In his heart, sons are treated

as sons, regardless of what they have done and where they have been. It is scandalous. There has been no trial period to see if the boy has changed. There are no hoops to jump through—just the humbling extravagant grace poured out on the object of the father's love.

The moralists can't rejoice. The first-born son was out in the fields hearing the celebration. He asked a servant what was going on. "Your brother is back." It was the worst news ever for the older boy. It just was not right. This boy had kept the deal he thought was in effect. He had focused on keeping the laws, and avoiding sin. He was sure this was how to make the father joyous. He was confused by such extravagant grace. They had killed the special calf. He had never even had a goat killed for him. He was jealous and refused to celebrate. He missed the party himself because he focused on the worthiness of the prodigal rather than the joy of the father. It wasn't the character of the younger boy they were celebrating. It was the joy of the father. He delights in restoring the lost, fallen, and undeserving. Too bad that religionists

still have trouble celebrating with the Father. Sinners must bear their shame and assuage their guilt. They must be put on probation at least and when they have proven they are sincere, we can begin to let them in.

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We get to show his nature in our own lives.

Sharing the Father's life is the greatest privilege ever. We are his image bearers. We get to show his nature in our own lives. We are "dynamized" to forgive because we have been forgiven. We can forgive as his agents. We can celebrate with him over the opportunity to express the grace that found us and established us as his sons in his house.

It doesn't take much thought to identify with either of the boys. We know that we are vulnerable to temptations beyond our willpower. We have dishonored the Father and his purposes in the world. We have failed and tried to bargain with God. If the Father had not run to us, we would have

been exposed in our community. We have trouble receiving such grace as he offers. In fact, we had rather just sign on as a servant. And, we can see ourselves standing outside the party offended that the Father is rejoicing over the return of an obvious sinner who has yet to prove either his sincerity or change of character. We refuse to celebrate because we are looking at the sinner instead of the Father. It takes some genuine repenting on our part. We must change our definition of reality and live in it. When we do, we will find joy.



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