

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32/ Joshua 5:9-12

**Luke 15: 2, “...This man accepts, welcomes sinners, and eats with them...”**

Chapter 15 of Luke is made up of the parables of the lost: **1-7 is the parable of the lost sheep; 8-10 is the parable of the lost coin; and 11-32 is the parable of the lost son (parable of the sons).**

I have put **“parable of the two sons”** in brackets because the title **“parable of the lost son”** might not be the appropriate title to this parable because it puts focus on the younger son and ignores the most important character of the parable, who is the elder son. The elder son is critical especially considering that this parable should be interpreted in the context of Jesus’ grumbling with the Pharisees i.e., 15:2, **“...This man accepts, welcomes sinners, and eats with them...”**

Interpreting this parable its context will enable us to focus not only on the younger brother but pay equal attention to the elder brother, the one who remained at home with the father. In this parable, the elder son is much important because it is his behaviour that is consistent or equated to that of the Pharisees, so this was a direct attack by Jesus to the Pharisees.

In this parable, Jesus is mocking the Pharisees, and this authenticates Muraoka’s definition of parables as “mocking/hurting speeches”. Just like in any other parables, in this parable, Jesus participated in the Ancient Mediterranean game of challenge and riposte. Whenever, Jesus told a parable he was responding to a challenge. So, in order to interpret the parable properly we should identify the challenge. In this case, the challenge was from the Pharisees, **“This man claims to be righteous, but he accepts, welcomes and eats with sinners”**. So, the story of the elder son is a direct attack on the Pharisees, and this authenticates Joachim Jeremias’ claim that, “Parables are weapons of warfare”.

We are not saying the younger son should be ignored or else what he did was right, he committed five serious sins in accordance with the Jewish customs:

- a) asked inheritance while the father was still alive
- b) He went to a very far away country, a gentile country for that matter
- c) He assumed use of property prematurely

d) He looked after the swine

e) he longed to eat with the swine

In the eyes of the Jews, the younger son was supposed not to be forgiven, he had sinned beyond reproach and beyond pardon. However, Jesus demonstrated that God unconditionally accepts and welcomes sinners who truly repent. Hence, if this son sinned more than the tax collectors then what would stop Jesus from eating with the tax collectors.

But friends, how would be the return of the younger son affect the life of the elder son? Some would say because the younger son spent his portion of wealth and now, he is back to share the wealth belonging to the elder brother. But as long as the father was still alive, then the remaining portion of wealth did not belong to the elder son but to the father, so the father had the liberty to spend it the way he like. The moment we say the remaining wealth belonged to the elder brother, then both would have committed the same sin of claiming their father's inheritance while the father was still alive.

So, the Pharisees claimed monopoly of God's grace. The returning or joining of new members to our communities especially communities of believers does not disadvantage us in any way but rather it strengthens us. We should lose sleep when one of us leaves but we should find peace and rejoice when one joins us. I have seen people being denied/blocked from doing certain things in the Church simply because of what they did yesterday, but we are being reminded that God accepts, welcomes, and eats with sinners. We are not saying we should not be accountable to each other as believers, but we are simply reminding one another that, **God unconditionally accepts, welcomes, and eats with sinners who truly repent.** If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. Amen.