

# Puzzling Parables

## *The Offended Brother*

May 28, 2017

*Welcome to where we're learning to appreciate the crazy mercy of God!*

**How many celebrations have you missed out on, simply because you were too offended by the person whose heart God was changing?**



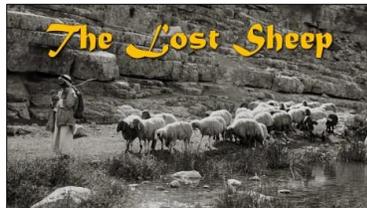
We're having dinner with Jesus, and His prodigal son: *Matthew*, and a whole household of **tax farmers** and those *devoted to sin*. (Lk 15:1)

The term translated as **tax collector** or **publican** (*telōnēs*: farmer of taxes), is actually **tax farmer**.



They were called that because they *harvested money*.

At the banquet, Jesus tells about a reckless son who squanders his birthright in the distant country, **to show not only the outcome of sin, but the income of humbly repenting and returning to our Father.**



Jesus shared this not only for the sake of all the reckless sinners *inside*, but the offended, "responsible" Pharisees remaining *outside*. He's reaching that part of His flock *too*.



In His prior parable of The Lost Sheep, these are the 99 self-righteous *left in the field*. Now, in the parable of The Lost Son, the offended, "responsible" son *comes in* from the field, but refuses to *enter in* to the party.



Know what's most often overlooked in Jesus' classic parable of the Prodigal Son?

"There was a man who had **two sons**." – Luke 15:11 NIV

**It should be called the parable of The Two Pigheaded Sons.**

One little son went to market. One stubborn son stayed home. And he's upset when the first repents, and goes we-we-we-we all the way home; and the younger had roast beef while the older got *none*.

Dad killed the fattened calf and everyone celebrated, except the self-righteous brother ... *and one other*. Know who was *even more upset* when Junior returned?



That fattened *calf!*

Ten years ago, we jammed my house full of teens to make this Red Chairable video. Everyone was jumping in unison to music, until we noticed that the house was separating from the porch each time they landed! We almost brought the house down!

Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. “Your brother has come,” he replied, “and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.” The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered 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. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!” “My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” - Luke 15:25-32 NIV



In the Old Testament, **one of Jacob’s twelve sons was named Levi.**

His tribe is the Levites. **The Levites were the priestly tribe God appointed to manage His Temple and teach His people.** (Num 18)

“Leviticus” means: the book of the Levites.



**Matthew-the-tax-farmer was named Levi.**

And, it would be odd to name a son after the head of a tribe unless he was born into it. (Mk 2:14; Lk 5:27)

And, **the book of Matthew was written to teach the Jews.** In fact, Levi’s Gospel contains more O.T. references than Mark and Luke and John *combined*. Levi had an incredible grasp of Scripture.

Levites were the only tribe that didn’t receive an inheritance of land; because, the *Father’s estate* was their inheritance. And, **the Pharisees were Levites**, which makes them Levitical tribal brothers of Levi a.k.a. Matthew-the-tax-farmer.

And, *not only that*; **the Levites were tax farmers.**

*Matthew* alone records an incident with the tax farming Pharisees.

... the collectors of the two-drachma tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn’t your teacher pay the temple tax?” – Matthew 17:24b NIV

The Pharisees collected and managed the Temple tax, the 10% tax (tithe), and special renovation taxes. And at this point in time, the Temple was in year 47 of a *major reconstruction project*.

Levites were trained in math and money changing, reading and writing, the Law and the regulations, and different languages. But, there weren't enough Temple jobs; so, when a Levite went looking for work, the Romans rewarded their tax farming skills.

But, **woe to those who left the Father's estate to tax-farm for the far-country enemy** (described as *swine* in Psalm 80:13). Those swine-loving sons were despised by their brother-Levites for selling out and squandering their birthright and inheritance.

Now, **Jesus needed a Levite to write a Gospel to the Jews.**



But, he needed someone unpolluted by the Pharisees' influence: **a despised one!** Sometimes it's hard to see how the Lord could put our offensive past to His good use.

**It's also difficult to see how Jesus might be working in, and changing the heart of, someone who has greatly offended us in the past.**



**So, always error on the side of grace and love. Or, you'll likely miss out on quite a few parties with Jesus.**

In Jesus' day, **Rome appointed the high priests**, and, *not* a Levite from the line of Aaron, which was an abomination *strictly forbidden*. (Ex 28)

So, those hypocritical Pharisees, refusing to join the party, are not only tax collectors *themselves*, but *they too* are working for Rome.

The older brother became angry and refused to go in. [Both pigheaded sons disrespect their dad] So his father went out and pleaded with him. [Another surprisingly gracious response in the face of a shockingly rebellious offense] But he answered his father, "Look! All these years **I've been slaving for you** and **never disobeyed your orders**."

Well the truth comes out! The "responsible" son actually sees himself as *enslaved*, and his father's instructions as *orders*. **That's what happens when we focus on rules over relationship.**

**Without joy, it's just a chore to stay on the farm.** And, I find it hard to believe that the so-called *responsible* son "**never disobeyed**", being that he's disobeying even as he speaks.



**Bitterness causes us to exaggerate our righteousness. Not to mention our hardships.** A self-centered sense of fairness will cause us to focus on the bad that's taken place over the good that's taking place.

Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

What?! He's blinded by his bitterness. His father had ...



... divided his wealth between **them**. – Luke 15:12b NIV

**Every goat and calf on that farm was given to him!** So, why can't he see this?

Because, **he's still trying to earn what he's freely received.**

*Someone* doesn't think dad is fair. *He's right.* **The father's mercy isn't fair; it's downright ridiculous!**

But when this son of yours **[Mr. Bitter won't call him *brother*]** who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

Who said anything about "**Prostitutes**"? *Someone* has an active imagination. He seems to think junior got away with something.



**Ever secretly envy the sinfulness of others?**

It's a common temptation for believers in a culture bent on brainwashing us with the insane fraud of consequence-free sin.

**It's like getting away with touching a little uranium. You don't.** It catches up.

**It's very dangerous to underestimate the cost of someone else's sin.**

Here's the self-righteous son in a nutshell: he's insulting, rude, disobeying, un-appreciating, exaggerating, and accusing. So, how does the father respond? He confronts him ... *with grace*.

"My son," the father said, **[reminding him that he's a son, not a slave]** "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. **[Just like the Levite Pharisees whose inheritance is everything that comes into the Temple]** But we had to celebrate and be glad, **[Who's this "we"? All three should be celebrating their family reunion]** because *this brother of yours* **[He's not just my son; he's your brother"]** was dead and is alive again; **[It's like handling that uranium; you won't feel it at first, but you're as good as dead. Unless dad has a cure, which He does: true sorrow met with eager forgiveness and joyful restoration]** he was lost **[a goner!]** and is found." - Luke 15:25-32 NIV

Dad killed the calf to celebrate the reunion with both sons.

**But, the bitter brother stopped himself from enjoying his own party!**

So, don't withhold grace and don't look down on others.

**Because we'll never be asked to forgive more than we've been forgiven.**

**And, it'll only keep you from joining the dance with Dad.**