

Luke 15:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

Analysis

And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry.

The father commands a feast of unprecedented celebration. The "fatted calf" (τὸν μόσχον τὸν σιτευτόν, ton moschon ton siteyton) was a young bull specially fattened for important occasions—weddings, major festivals, or distinguished guests. Killing this calf meant the whole village would feast, for one household could not consume an entire calf. The father's joy overflows into community-wide celebration.

The phrase "let us eat, and be merry" (φαγόντες εὐφρανθῶμεν, phagontes euphranthōmen) uses the verb euphraínō (εὐφραίνω), meaning to rejoice exceedingly, celebrate festively, make merry with gladness. This is no restrained acknowledgment but explosive, uncontainable joy. The imperative mood and plural form ("let us") invite all to share the father's delight—servants, neighbors, the entire household must join the celebration.

This feast anticipates the messianic banquet Jesus repeatedly described (Luke 14:15-24, Matthew 22:1-14). Heaven celebrates every sinner who repents (Luke 15:7, 10), and the return of the lost occasions divine rejoicing that demands expression. The sacrificial death of the fatted calf also foreshadows Christ's sacrifice—celebration of the redeemed is only possible through substitutionary death. Just as the calf's death enables the feast, Christ's death enables our welcome into God's kingdom and our place at His table.

Historical Context

In first-century agrarian society, killing the fatted calf represented extraordinary expense and generosity. Most families ate meat rarely, reserving it for Passover, weddings, or significant religious festivals. The father's command to slaughter this valuable asset demonstrates grace's extravagance—no expense is too great to celebrate a lost son's return. The feast would include the entire village, publicly honoring the son and announcing his full restoration to the community.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does the father's extravagant celebration teach about God's emotional response to repentant sinners?
2. How does the sacrificial death of the fatted calf foreshadow Christ's necessary death to enable our feast with God?
3. In what ways should the church's celebration of new believers and restored backsliders mirror the father's joyful feast?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἐνέγκαντες τὸν μόσχον τὸν σιτευτόν θύσατε καὶ
And bring hither the fatted and kill And
G2532 G5342 G3588 G3448 G4618 G2380 G2532

φαγόντες εὐφρανθῶμεν

let us eat and be merry
G5315 G2165

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 25:6 (Parallel theme): And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined.

Psalms 63:5 (Parallel theme): My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips:

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