

Luke 15:24

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

Analysis

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. This verse is the father's joyful declaration in Jesus' Parable of the Prodigal Son, one of Scripture's most powerful portrayals of repentance and grace. The Greek *nekros* (νεκρός, "dead") and *anezesen* (ἀνέζησεν, "is alive again") frame the son's condition in the starker terms—not merely wayward but dead, not merely improved but resurrected. The phrase "was lost, and is found" uses *apolōlōs* (ἀπολωλώς, "utterly destroyed/lost") and *heurethē* (εὗρεθη, "has been found"), emphasizing the completeness of both lostness and recovery.

The father's response—*ērxanto euphrainesthai* (ἥρξαντο εὐφραίνεσθαι, "they began to be merry")—describes exuberant celebration, not restrained acknowledgment. The Greek suggests ongoing, escalating joy. This reveals **the heart of God toward repentant sinners: not grudging acceptance but ecstatic welcome, not probationary status but full restoration to sonship.** The robe, ring, sandals, and fatted calf (vv. 22-23) all signify complete reinstatement to the privileges of family membership.

This verse crystallizes the gospel: spiritual death is our natural condition apart from God (Ephesians 2:1), but God makes us alive in Christ (Ephesians 2:4-5). The father's joy reflects heaven's celebration over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7, 10). The parable confronts self-righteous religion (represented by the elder

brother) and reveals God's passionate desire to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).

Historical Context

Jesus told this parable in response to Pharisees and scribes grumbling that "this man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). In first-century Jewish society, **table fellowship signified acceptance and intimacy**—sharing meals with "tax collectors and sinners" scandalized the religious establishment. The three parables in Luke 15 (lost sheep, lost coin, lost son) progressively intensify the celebration theme, climaxing with the prodigal's return.

The cultural context enriches the parable's impact. For a Jewish son to demand his inheritance while the father lived was equivalent to wishing the father dead—a profound dishonor. The son's subsequent lifestyle (feeding pigs, eating their food) would mark him as utterly unclean by Jewish standards. **No respectable Middle Eastern father would run to meet a son** (v. 20)—such undignified behavior was culturally shocking, yet the father's love overcame cultural shame.

The elder brother's protest (vv. 25-32) represents the Pharisees' self-righteous objection to grace. They had "served" God dutifully and "never transgressed" His commandments (v. 29), yet they lacked joy in God and resented His mercy toward sinners. Jesus exposes that external obedience without love for the Father or compassion for the lost reveals a fundamentally flawed relationship with God. The parable's genius lies in showing that both sons needed grace—one to forgive scandalous rebellion, the other to cure self-righteous resentment.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does understanding your natural spiritual condition as "dead" rather than merely "sick" deepen your appreciation for God's saving grace?
2. In what ways do you identify more with the prodigal's obvious sin or the elder brother's subtle self-righteousness?
3. What would it look like for you to genuinely celebrate God's mercy to others who seem less deserving than yourself?
4. How does the father's undignified running and extravagant welcome challenge your mental picture of God's attitude toward repentant sinners?
5. How does Christ's substitutionary death make possible this kind of unreserved welcome for those who deserve only judgment?

Interlinear Text

ὅτι	οὗτος	ό	νιός	μου	νεκρός	ἦν	καὶ	ἀνέζησεν	καὶ
For	this	G3588	son	my	dead	he was	And	is alive again	And
G3754	G3778		G5207	G3450	G3498	G2258	G2532	G326	G2532
ἀπολωλὼς	ἦν	καὶ	εὑρέθη	καὶ	ἤρξαντο	εὐφραίνεσθαι			
lost	he was	And	is found	And	they began	to be merry			
G622	G2258	G2532	G2147	G2532	G756	G2165			

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 2:5 (Parallel theme): Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

Ezekiel 34:16 (Parallel theme): I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick: but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment.

Colossians 2:13 (Parallel theme): And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses;

Luke 19:10 (Parallel theme): For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke 15:4 (Parallel theme): What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

Ephesians 2:1 (Parallel theme): And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins;

Luke 15:32 (Parallel theme): It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Romans 8:2 (Parallel theme): For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

Romans 6:11 (Parallel theme): Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Isaiah 35:10 (Parallel theme): And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.