

Luke 15:25

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.

Analysis

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. The narrative shifts to introduce the elder brother, whose response reveals the second major threat to relationship with God—not scandalous sin but self-righteous religion. He was "in the field" (ἐν ἀγρῷ, *en agrō*), dutifully working while celebration erupted at home. His location symbolizes distance from the father's heart despite physical proximity to the father's estate—he labors in the inheritance but misses the family joy.

The phrase "he heard musick and dancing" (συμφωνίας καὶ χορῶν, *symphōnias kai chorōn*) indicates elaborate celebration. The word *symphōnia* (συμφωνία) refers to harmonious music, perhaps multiple instruments playing together. The term *choroi* (χοροί, plural of *choros*) means dancing, communal celebration with movement. The scope of this feast—audible from a distance—reveals the father's extravagant joy and the household's full participation.

This verse exposes the tragedy of joyless duty. The elder brother has been faithful externally, working the father's fields, but he's excluded from the father's joy. He represents those who serve God from obligation rather than love, who resent grace shown to others, who measure their worth by comparison to greater sinners. His distance from the celebration despite proximity to the house parallels the Pharisees' spiritual condition—close to God's kingdom externally, far from His heart internally.

Historical Context

In agrarian Palestine, the eldest son typically managed the estate and would have been working in the fields supervising laborers or personally tending crops and livestock. His return at day's end to find unexpected celebration would have been startling. Music and dancing accompanied significant Jewish celebrations—weddings, festivals, victories. The elaborate nature of this celebration signaled an extraordinary event worthy of community-wide joy.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does the elder brother's location 'in the field' symbolize dutiful service disconnected from joyful relationship?
2. In what ways might believers today be 'in the field' working for God while missing His heart of celebration over the redeemed?
3. What does the scale of the celebration teach about the appropriate Christian response to conversion and restoration?

Interlinear Text

Ἦν	δὲ	ὁ	υἱὸς	αὐτοῦ	ὁ	πρεσβύτερος	ἐν	ἀγρῷ·	καὶ
was	Now	G3588	son	his	G3588	elder	in	the field	and
G2258	G1161		G5207	G846		G4245	G1722	G68	G2532
ὥς	ἐρχόμενος	ἤγγισεν	τῇ	οἰκίᾳ	ἤκουσεν				
as	he came	and drew nigh	G3588	to the house	he heard				
G5613	G2064	G1448		G3614	G191				
συμφωνίας	καὶ	χορῶν							
musick	and	dancing							
G4858	G2532	G5525							

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 150:4 (Parallel theme): Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.