

Luke 15:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

Analysis

And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

Rather than rushing in to join the celebration, the elder brother pauses outside to interrogate a servant (παῖδα, paida, literally "boy" or "young servant"). His question "what these things meant" (τί ἂν εἴη ταῦτα, ti an eiē tauta) reveals his detachment from the household's emotional life. He doesn't recognize that such celebration could only mean something profoundly joyful has occurred.

The elder brother's caution and questioning expose his suspicious, calculating mindset. Rather than assuming good news worthy of investigation, he stands outside analyzing, judging, maintaining distance. This contrasts sharply with the father's immediate, undignified running toward the prodigal (v. 20). The elder brother's reserve and propriety keep him on the margins while grace celebrates inside.

This behavior reveals the fundamental problem with merit-based religion: it cannot comprehend or celebrate grace. Those who believe they've earned God's favor through obedience struggle to rejoice when the undeserving receive free mercy. The elder brother's questioning reflects the Pharisees' attitude toward Jesus welcoming tax collectors and sinners—suspicious interrogation rather than joyful participation in God's redemptive work.

Historical Context

First-century social protocol would normally require the eldest son to host such a celebration, greeting guests and managing the feast. His absence and need to ask what's happening indicates his complete exclusion from planning and his father's joy. This public slight would have been noticed by all attendees, adding to his humiliation and fueling his resentment.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does the elder brother's interrogation of the servant rather than joining the celebration reveal about his heart condition?
2. How does suspicion toward celebrations of grace indicate a merit-based rather than grace-based understanding of salvation?
3. In what ways might believers today stand outside 'asking what these things mean' rather than celebrating God's work in others' lives?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	προσκαλεσάμενος	ἓνα	τῶν	παίδων	αὐτοῦ
And	he called	one		of the servants	
G2532	G4341	G1520	G3588	G3816	G846
ἐπυνθάνετο	τί	εἶη	ταῦτα		
and asked	what	meant	these things		
G4441	G5101	G1498	G5023		