

Luke 15

Verses 1-3:

--Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." So He spoke this parable to them, saying:

--(1) Matthew gives us a version of the first parable, but Luke alone gives us the other two—particularly that of the Prodigal Son. No doubt, this is one of the most well-known and much-loved chapters of the Bible.

--The tax collectors and sinners draw near to Jesus. They are those who didn't even try to live up to the Rabbinic standards. They were unholy and unclean, but Jesus had no fear of being defiled or disliked by them.

--Why did they draw near to Jesus? ***To hear Him!***

--Jesus was such a contrast from the religious leaders. He was holy (in fact, His moral teaching was even more stringent than that of the Pharisees: **Mt. 5:27-32**), but His holiness was expressed in mercy and love. The Pharisees expressed their holiness by contempt and isolation.

--Jesus has no sympathy for sin. He enjoyed no fellowship with darkness, but He did reveal God's heart of mercy for lost and broken sinners.

--(2) The Pharisees and scribes ***complained***—which is a unique Greek word (*diagongyzo*) used only by Luke here and in **19:7**. It describes indignant murmuring running through a whole crowd.

--The religious leaders complained because they thought God's attitude toward sinners looked like theirs instead of Jesus'.

--(3) Jesus tells ***this parable***. . . which means the three are meant to be taken as one singular response revealing God's heart toward sinners.

--The continuation of the thought is clear in: ***this parable (3); or (8); Then He said*** (or *Jesus continued*) in **(11)**.

Verses 4-7:

--What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

--(4) Jesus begins addressing the religious leaders with a familiar line of reasoning. He exposes their hypocrisy by identifying their care for animals over people.

--Few creatures are more helpless or vulnerable than a lost sheep! Something is terribly wrong if a sheep is without a flock, and even worse, without a shepherd. In leaving its shepherd, a sheep has lost everything.

--Fortunately, Jesus says this shepherd will search for the lost sheep. Where? In ***the wilderness!*** The shepherd has to search in dangerous places. Crag and cliffs, defiles or deserts, thick woods or rushing rivers, etc.

--Think of where God has chased down and found His lost sheep:

-A fearful manipulator alone on the other side of the Jabbok who needed to be wrestled down and broken (Jacob).

-A lonely, broken murderer on the backside of the desert (Moses).

-A sightless and enslaved hero shackled between two pillars (Samson).

-An imprisoned king with hands that shed innocent blood, cut and bleeding from having been dragged through thorns, fettered and lying on a dungeon floor (Manasseh).

-A runaway rebel prophet sloshing in the belly of a whale (Jonah).

-A little man, under large conviction, perched in a tree (Zacchaeus).

-A thief, dying on the cross next to Him.

-An insolent and blasphemous self-righteous bigot who hated Him on the way to kill Christians (Paul).

--What wilderness of sin did our Shepherd have to find us in?

--How long does He look? Beautiful words! ***Until He finds it!*** How long till He found us? How many miles of blind refusals, rejections, iniquities, transgressions, and ingratitude did He push through in our lives?

--What did Jesus say after Zacchaeus's repentance?

****Luke 19:9-10: And Jesus said to him, "Today, salvation has come to this house, because he also is a son of Abraham; for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."****

--(5) What does the shepherd do when he finds his lost sheep? Drive the sheep back to the fold, with a rod or whip? The sheep is weary and broken from its lostness, and the shepherd ***lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.***

--This is how He treats us. He is gentle with us in the brokenness and weariness of our sins. He carries us in grace when we have no strength left to get to where we need to go. He rejoices. He does not berate, scold, or condemn.

--(6) He would have shared the pain of the loss with those around him, but now he shares the joy of finding with them as well.

--(7) ***I say to you.*** . . Is a confident declaration of truth. Only Jesus can reveal to us what the tone of heaven is when sinners repent on earth!

--The contrast is clearly with the grief of loss (A lost sheep, coin, son) and the joy of finding. Why do the angels rejoice? Because God rejoices! The angels of heaven do not originate heavenly joy. God is the origin of heaven's joy. The angels are sharers in the Father's joy.

*Bellett (*The Evangelists*, pg. 205): "He had been charged by the Pharisees with receiving sinners, as though His ministry did not secure righteousness, but gave liberty to evil. Of course He might have pleaded various answers to this. He might have defended His grace to sinners, on the ground of the necessity of the case, or on the ground of God's glory. But in this chapter, from beginning to end, in each of the lovely parables, He vindicates it simply on the ground of the joy that He, and the Father, and all heaven itself, were finding in it."*

--Who are these **just persons who need no repentance**? I believe they are clearly the religious leaders who *think* they are righteous. That is how Jesus addresses them on numerous occasions: **Mt. 9:13; Mk. 2:17; Lk. 5:31-32; 18:9.**

Verses 8-10:

--***Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.***

--(8) The silver coin would have been part of a dowry mounted on a headband, or worn on a necklace, or could have just been lost. It was equal to a day's wage (**Mt. 20:2**).

--Here is a slightly more noticeable loss. First, we have one in one hundred. Now, we have one in ten. Where the parable of the lost sheep reflected the misery and vulnerability of the lost, this parable reflects the value of what is lost to the one who lost it.

--Jesus would later use a coin to illustrate that images infer ownership, and men ought to give Caesar what is Caesar's and God what is God's. We owe God a debt as our Creator. We are His creation made in His image and His likeness.

--As the lost silver coin mattered very much to the woman, as remarkable as the words seem, you and I matter to God. Lost sinners have unrealized value to their Creator. *Realizing this should encourage intercessory prayer for those who are lost or prodigals.*

--(9) There is rejoicing when the owner regains her lost coin. She also, like the shepherd, shares that joy with those she no doubt shared the loss with.

--(10) Angels take interest in the things of men because their interest is where God is working. See: **Mt. 18:10; 25:31; Lk. 2:10-14; 1 Cor. 13:1; 1 Peter 1:12; Rev. 3:5; 5:11; 14:10.**

--If the angels rejoiced at the creation (**Job 38:7**), it is easy to imagine them rejoicing at the eternal salvation of a soul.

Verses 11-16:

--Then He said: *“A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of the goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.*

--(11) We saw one out of one hundred, lost. One in ten, lost. Now, one of two, lost.

--(12) The younger son asks for his portion of the inheritance, which would have been a third of the estate, as the older brother would have the double portion.

--Sadly, he wanted to separate himself and his things from his father.

--(13) In short order, he does just that. *Think of the pain of it all as he leaves.*

Jeremiah 2:27: For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face.

--He goes to *a far country*—creating as much distance as possible.

--He lives as a *prodigal*, the Greek word (*asotos*) used only here in the NT. It describes *wasteful, riotous, profligate* living. *Selfish, indulgent, purposeless living.*

--(14) **But when he had spent all.** . . He was fully given to sin. He gave his all to it. He indulged in all the sin he was capable of.

Jeremiah 3:5: Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, as you were able.

--Famine and want come. He separated from his father and discovered that his personal supplies were limited and quickly drained.

--(15) What does he do now? Does he return to his father? No, he chooses to remain with strangers who don’t know him and don’t care about him one bit.

Jeremiah 3:7: And I said, after she had done all these things, ‘Return to Me.’ But she did not return.

--(16) What happens? Unimaginable degradation. The swine are valued more than he is. *No Jewish man—he was a man—would have ever imagined himself in this state.*

--Sin is hard, shaming, and enslaving (**Prov. 13:15; Jn. 8:34; Rom. 6:21**). *The shame of our past sin can be so taboo, so dark, and so painful!*

Jeremiah 2:32: Yet My people have forgotten Me days without number.

Verses 17-19:

--*“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”*

--(17) At his lowest point, the prodigal son saw himself and his life clearly. *Interestingly enough, he still didn't see his father clearly!*

--(18-19) Jesus unveils the language of true repentance: I have sinned against heaven, before others, and am no longer worthy. I am willing to take the place of a servant.

--I believe this is the best summary of a repentant heart in all the Bible. Anyone who isn't willing to say those things will remain distant from God and unrepentant.

Verses 20-24:

--***"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'***

"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

--(20) ***And he arose and came to his father.*** . . The humbling journey back is hard for a prodigal, but it is part of genuine repentance. *Must be a whole-hearted return.*

--What he still doesn't understand is his father's heart toward sinning sons. *The religious leaders should have known from the Scriptures!*

Jeremiah 3:4-5: Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My Father, You are the guide of my youth? Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end?'

Jeremiah 3:19+22: 'You shall call Me, "My Father," and not turn away from Me'. . . "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings." Indeed we do come to You for You are the LORD our God.

--What is the response of the father? To close the distance. Compassion. Love greater than shame (he ran). Personal affection. ***Kissed him.*** . . is *kissed him much.*

--The father's love is not ignorant of the prodigal's sins, but it is superior.

--(21) The prodigal confesses his sin. All these things are true.

--(22) The brisk commands reveal joy and decisiveness.

--The robe, ring, and sandals are evidence of full sonship. The father will not accept his son back as anything less than a son. *Expectation to live and walk worthy of sonship.*

--God the Father, will not have His relationship with us based on something less than all He made us to be in Jesus Christ.

--What the prodigal was once ashamed of and sought to separate himself from—His father and His father's house—now become the basis of his covering, identity, walk, and joy.

--In his institutes, John Calvin prayed: *"You have no other feelings toward us than those of a father, though we are unworthy of such a parent."*

--(23-24) **The fatted calf.** . . was one that would be kept ready for special occasions. The dead coming back to life, and the lost being found, are causes for celebration.

--In that day and age, this son should have been a cause for shame to the father, household, and village, but the father and his servants rejoice.

Verses 25-31:

--***“Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’***

“But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. So he answered and said to his father, “Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.”

“And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”

--(25-27) Clearly, the older brother is reflective of the religious leaders and their attitude toward sinners.

--(28) The self-righteous anger keeps the older son at a distance, just as the younger son’s selfish indulgence drove him to a distance. The father, in loving compassion, meets both!

--(29-30) To the older son, service to the father was slavery to a stern master. Listen to the self-righteousness:

-Many years of service.

-Never transgressed.

-Never gave.

-Even a goat Vs. fatted calf.

-Me and my friends.

-This son of yours. . . not “my brother.”

-Devoured with harlots.

--Merit acquired makes mercy an insult. The older brother felt that he was a good person who deserved something from his father. He had earned something because he hadn’t obviously sinned like the younger brother.

--The Pharisees clearly ignored their sins of disposition and looked down on sins of passion or of the body. *How many lives does pride, selfishness, insecurity, judgmentalism, greed, worry, slander, control, anger, gossip, etc. destroy?*

--**(31-32) For your brother.** . . The religious leaders were watching lost brothers and sisters being found by Jesus and complaining about it!

--Jesus is making it clear that the recovery of any dead or lost soul should be a cause for joy and not grumbling.

*Gooding (According to Luke, pg. 285): *"The parable, then, told the Pharisees that they were out of sympathy with the Father and with the angels, and that they were in danger of excluding themselves deliberately from one of the chief joys of the heavenly banquet."**

--Again, the parable is left unfinished for the hearers to tell the end of the story with their own lives.

--How can God the Father love us in this way?

Deuteronomy 21:18-21: *If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and who, when they have chastened him, will not heed them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city, to the gate of his city. And they shall say to the elders of the city, 'This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious; he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard.' Then all the men of his city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall put away the evil from among you, and all Israel shall hear and fear.*

--Why wasn't the prodigal son stoned? Is the OT God so different from the NT God? No, the difference was because of the Son, the one telling the parable about the Father's heart for sinners, who had come to save His people from their sin.

--In the cross of Jesus Christ, we see God's hatred of sin and His love for the sinner. There, the one and only Perfect Son, was killed for all the imperfect sons and daughters who would one day simply look to Him in faith.

--Now, every repentant sinner that comes to the Father, through the Son, finds forgiveness, love, new life, and all the hosts of heaven rejoicing.

--One of Satan's greatest and most blatant lies is that a repentant and returning prodigal could cause heaven any other feeling rather than joy.