

Luke 15 (Part 1) :1-10 • Rejoicing When the Lost Are Found

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This chapter begins by telling us that, people who were socially outcast because they were tax collectors or sinners, which means notorious sinners were coming to hear Jesus. And that's pretty significant from the standpoint that, Jesus was never really known for being soft on sin. He didn't play patty-cake when it came to issues of sin. And if there was issues, if there were sin, He'd call it out. He loved people but He called out sin.

And it is significant that these people felt comfortable and had a desire to want to be with Jesus. And of course that just makes me think that's the way our churches ought to be too. You know what I mean? If that's the way Jesus was... If he drew people with a level of comfort even people who recognized and knew that they were involved in a lifestyle of sin. Those people ought to feel comfortable in our churches too. And if they don't then maybe we're not representing Jesus. Which is a scary thought.

I think we've gone through periods in our history as the body of Christ, when we haven't been very welcoming. And we've left people with a feeling like you can come to church once you get your act together. As if the rest of us have our act together who are already here.

But I think we've left people with that impression. And we have to remember our Savior, our Savior - people were comfortable around Him who even had been living in a lifestyle of sin. And I'm not suggesting that we should make people feel comfortable in their sin. Jesus didn't do that. Like I said, He wasn't soft on sin. He just made people feel comfortable because I think they knew that they were loved. And that He cared.

But this is especially significant in that, when we ended chapter 14, just last week, you'll remember that Jesus had some pretty strong words for the people who were following him as it relates to counting the cost to that following. And He was saying things like, unless you..., unless you..., unless you... And making some pretty bold statements, then you can't be My disciple.

And yet here's these people, these tax collectors. And you guys understand why tax collectors were socially on the outs with the Jews. They were basically considered traitors because they were collecting taxes. Not for Israel but for Rome. And they were hated. And they usually had a fairly immoral lifestyle that went along with them.

And these other sinners, people who didn't really care what anybody thought of them. Here are these people now coming to Jesus. And wanting to hear what He has to say. And if they heard Him saying what we heard Him saying last week about counting the cost, and they're still there, then I think that would suggest to us that these people had a willingness to acknowledge their sin. And not just cover it up. Or say, well, it's not that big of a deal, or whatever. And these people were actually dealing with their sin.

Of course, all that would mean nothing to the Jewish religious leaders. It says here as we continue reading, that they were criticizing. They were criticizing Jesus for even connecting with these people who were coming to hear Him.

Because you see, the Pharisees had essentially divided people into two convenient groups. There was the righteous and the unclean. And of course they were the righteous. And anybody who kept the law just like they did were considered righteous as well. And then there was the unclean or the sinners.

And the problem with their understanding of this whole thing is that they believed that they were righteous before God because they kept the law. They believed that they were keeping it in a unique and powerful way. And because of that, they now had a righteous standing before God. And what that did, is it created a separation in their understanding between them and the little people, the sinners. And they looked at people very poorly.

And they believed that if they associated with those people, that their own personal righteousness would be compromised. It was so serious in some rabbis minds, that they would actually refuse to teach the Scripture to some people. Because they didn't think they were worthy to hear the Word of God.

And in response to all of this attitude, and of course the Pharisees were always thick with attitude. But in response to all of this sort of self-righteousness and looking down on people and so forth, Jesus begins to tell a couple of parables. And what I want you to know going into this from the get-go is that these parables are given for one reason and one reason only. And that is to reveal the heart of God. Okay?

Jesus being God in human flesh is communicating to the people all around Him, including the Pharisees who are full of criticism and bitterness and grumbling, what is the heart of God toward people who are basically sinners. Okay.

And He begins, in this parable form, to speak of a shepherd who has 100 sheep and one of them becomes lost. And then Jesus goes on in verse 4. If you look with me again, to ask a question. He says, *"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?" (ESV)*

And this question, of course, was something that was fully understood by the people listening to Jesus at the time. Because they knew that a shepherd wasn't just somebody who went out to care for the flock. And it's like, make sure they got their food or whatever. No, they were personally responsible for the sheep. And the people that were listening to Jesus knew that.

And basically that meant that if a sheep ever got lost on your watch, if you were going to bring the sheep back, you had to come back with some sort of proof that sheep had died. You'd have to bring back its fleece, or a body part, or something, showing that why you were missing one sheep. And there was this responsibility.

And we learned concerning the early life of David, when we go through the Old Testament, we learn that David would regularly risk his life for the sheep when predators came onto the scene. We're told that he would actually, physically, go and attack the predators in order to save the flock. And this was the responsibility that shepherds had for the flocks. They took care of them.

Now you have to understand something else about this. People read this parable and they go, well, that was a dumb shepherd to leave the 99 sheep out there uncared for while he went to go look for the one. Isn't that a dumb thing to do? Don't the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few? Star Trek. Right? Some of you guys got that. Some of you just went right over your head.

Anyway. But you got to understand that the pasture land was in fairly short supply at that time as it is today. And shepherds would shepherd their flocks communally. And that means they would... There'd be several flocks that would come together. And the shepherds would work together with their flocks. And if one of the shepherds recognized that one of his sheep was missing, he would leave his flock because it was still with all the other shepherds. And he would go after the one who was missing to find that sheep wherever it might be.

And as the other shepherds would then be taking care of the flock, eventually they would bring them back from the grazing. Or at the end of the day, they'd bring them back to wherever they were going to be penned for the night or whatever. They'd bring...

And they would communicate to the people in their village, or whatever, if one of the shepherds was missing. If one of the shepherds had gone out in search of a lost sheep, they would communicate that as they came back. And they would say, so and so lost one and he's out... We brought back all his sheep. But he's out looking for that one.

And I'm told that the village people would then gather at the outskirts of the community. And they would wait for that one remaining shepherd to come back. And as they would see him in the distance, walking toward the community with the sheep, the lost sheep on his shoulders safe and sound, they would erupt with cheers and shouts of success.

You see that the thing that Jesus is talking about here, this was readily understood by the people of the day. They understood the concept. They understood what He was saying.

And then Jesus, after telling this goes on to say in verse 7, if you look with me again in your Bible, *"Just so, (he says) I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."*

And the words in that verse *"more joy"* ought to jump out at you. Because that's the point of the parable. Okay.

Because remember, Jesus is addressing the attitude of the Pharisees. Their critical bitter attitude about this sort of a thing. Because you see those Pharisees and religious leaders, they saw the tax collectors coming to hear Jesus.

They saw all those other notorious sinners coming to hear Jesus. And instead of being happy, instead of being joyful, they criticized. All they could do was see it as a negative. They felt no joy for the fact that these people were turning away from their past lifestyle and now coming and opening their hearts to God.

And the reason is because they cared nothing for the lost. The Jews, the religious legalistic Jews, cared only for the keeping of the law. They didn't care for people. Basically, what Jesus is doing here is He's showing us the heart of

God toward the lost. God's heart is that there is great joy in heaven when one lost person is found.

Do you know? And I read this from the commentary by William Barclay. He's an interesting man. He, well, he's with the Lord now. He was fairly liberal in some of his theology. But he was a great historian. And I like reading his stuff for some of the historical background that he gives.

He says that there was actually a saying among the Pharisees. That they said, there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who is obliterated before God. And now, if in fact that's true and Jesus knew that. And is speaking His statement, there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, then you can see that Jesus is specifically speaking and addressing the heart of the pharisaical community.

Jesus is teaching here that God cares. And He actually seeks for the lost. He searches for lost people. Which gives a new slant to that whole idea of I found God, doesn't it? It's, well, I think He found you! But God cares enough to go looking for the lost.

And this agrees with what we see elsewhere in the counsel of God's Word. Specifically in the Book of Ezekiel. Check out this passage on the screen. Very interesting. Out of the NIV I'm quoting this. But it says, this is the Lord speaking. He says,

Ezekiel 18:32 (NIV)

...I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

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His word to people is, stop holding on to your stubborn refusal to come to Me. Repent and live! I take no pleasure in the death of anyone.

And another comment that I had read actually in my commentaries from William Barkley. He says that there was a Jewish scholar, he doesn't mention who it was. But he says there was a Jewish scholar that read this parable. And he said after reading it, he said, wow! That is a very unique truth that comes out of that passage. And that is that God searches for men.

God searches for men. God actually goes looking for them. But here's the deal. He doesn't just search for men. He searches for sinners. He searches for sinners. And I love what the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, when he... Put this on the screen for you. He said,

1 Timothy 1:15 (NIV)

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst."

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He says, "I'm the chief, I am, I'm the most notorious of all." Jesus Christ came in the world to save sinners. And man am I glad He did! Because I am one.

And then there's this beautiful statement he makes in Romans chapter 5, look at this verse 8.

Romans 5:8 (ESV)

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

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Do you guys understand that Jesus didn't die for righteous people? He died for sinners. He gave His life, not for people who had it together. He gave His life for people whose lives were a train wreck. He gave His life for people who didn't care. Who had no desire to reach out and understand even the things of God. It's those people He gave His life for. He gave His life for people that were sinning and liking it. Living in it. Enjoying it. Wow!

And then we come to this second parable. Which communicates the same message. He begins in verse 8 by saying, "*Or what woman having ten silver coins, (Notice that now it's a number 10. Earlier it was one sheep out of a hundred. Now it's one coin out of 10. It says,) if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it.*"

And the coin that would be lost here is the coin that is called the drachma. And it represented one day's wages. And she's got 10 of these coins. That's worth 10 days of work. Not a great, huge savings you wouldn't think. And obviously for a

peasant woman, the loss of just one coin was a significant thing. And she looks diligently for it in this parable.

And then in verse 9, He says, *"And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I found the coin that I had lost.'"*

And again, the simple message here is that God rejoices. God rejoices over the lost being found. And that's how Jesus connects it in verse 10 where He says again, *"Just so, (or in like manner) I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

We read these two parables and guess what? Now we know how God feels about lost people. We know that He goes searching for them. We know that when He finds them, there's joy in heaven. And there is rejoicing among the angels when one person comes to the Lord.

Did you ever stop to think about the fact that you made heaven rejoice when you came to Christ? When you bowed the knee and you said, yes, Jesus I embrace. I accept what You did for me on the cross.

Do you ever stop to think about heaven going, yay! Just breaking out into a little bit of a party. Yeah, finally! Finally, with some of you. Finally, she came! Finally, He did it! He bowed the knee! Yeah!

Some of the angels were probably going, man, I didn't think he'd ever come. Yeah. Talk about stubborn. I've been watching this guy all his life. But he finally did it!

I was telling the guys in our Friday morning Bible study about a guy who attended our church for seven years with his wife before he actually came to Christ. And he came... They came regularly. They've since moved to another part of Idaho.

But it was pretty amazing when he finally came. Because I like to say he was born breach. Because he was... He finally came to the Lord in my living room. He came over and we started talking. And I could tell that he was on the edge of something. And he literally was down on his hands and knees on the floor panting. Almost like hyperventilating as he was just resisting the whole way.

I was just sitting there watching him. I was. And I don't know if you've ever seen a breech birth. But this guy was just... It was hard. It was a hard birth. But

he finally came to the Lord. And there was a really dynamic change in his life after that point. But I tell you, he just came kicking and screaming into the kingdom. And I'm sure there were a few angels going, finally!

We know now how God feels about the lost. God cares about sinners. Do you guys understand that no Pharisee ever dreamed of God having a heart like that? Do you understand that? The Pharisees never once entertained the thought that somehow God cared that way about sinners.

As far as they were concerned, sinners, they were fuel for hell. Throw a few in. We need to stoke this thing up a little bit. That was their understanding. To the Pharisees, God was austere, and stern, and quick to strike out in wrath. And because their view of God was that way, they couldn't probably... This whole idea that Jesus is giving in these parables was probably like a foreign language to them.

Here's the interesting thing about this. In the time that I've been a pastor, I have met a lot of people. I was sitting here thinking to myself, is it really a lot of people? There's been several who's vision... No, that's not the right word. Whose perspective of God was more pharisaical than what Jesus is telling us here.

In other words, I've met a good number of people who would say that they are born again Christians. And yet they see God as strict and exacting and even a little bit cruel. And that's their view of God. And this sort of an idea that we're looking at in these parables of God running after lost people to save them is like a foreign thought.

I found a quote. There's one of my favorite quotes from the book, Knowledge of the Holy, by A.W. Tozer. If you haven't read that book, write it down somewhere and read it. But I'm going to put this up on the screen for you. Listen to what Tozer says. He says,

Were we able to extract from any man a complete answer to the question, "What comes into your mind when you think about God?" we might predict with certainty the spiritual future of that man. Were we able to know exactly what our most influential spiritual leaders think of God today, we might be able with some precision to foretell where the church will stand tomorrow. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its...idea of God. For this reason...the most [predictive] fact about any man is not what he at any given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. - A.W. Tozer

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Isn't that a great quote? And I believe it's 100 percent true. If you can figure out what somebody thinks God is like, you can figure out what kind of a relationship he's either going to have or not want to have with God.

And I am surprised some people after talking to Him even want to come to church. I'm surprised some people even want to pick up their Bible. And I'm not surprised that they don't want to pray. That they find it hard to pray. Because to them it's, God is harsh. And they're just waiting for the sword to fall. And they're constantly worried.

And they read passages in the Bible that talk about warnings that are given to lukewarm believers or something like that. And they apply it to their lives constantly. And they're fearful. They're constantly fearful that someday they're going to do something, or say something, and God is going to say, that's it. I've had enough of you. I'm done with you. I'm cutting you off, forever. And they live in perpetual fear of that reality.

And it breaks my heart. It absolutely breaks my heart. Because the heart of God could not be more opposite. The heart of God delights (we're told) to show mercy. The heart of God is forgiving. The heart of God is loving, caring, tender.

No, God's not soft on sin but He loves sinners. And He will confront your sin. But God is the only One who can confront your sin. And you and I can get up from that and go, I think He loves me. When I confront people's sin, they usually walk away going, forget you, buddy. And they want nothing more to do with me. That's just not my gift. It just isn't.

I try to leave that up to the Holy Spirit as often as possible. Because He just has this way with people. He confronts our sin and we're happy about it. He did... Have you ever noticed that? You're reading through the Bible and He busts you. I mean bust you open about some area of sin in your life. And you're going, thank You, Jesus, for showing me that. Anybody else would confront you with

that and you'd walk away in a huff all offended. How dare you say that to me? And God does it and we're thanking Him for it. Thank You for showing me that Lord! That's really great. I'm a sinner.

And the reason that we... The reason that we have such joy and such peace, even when confronted with our sin, is because we know, that we know, that we know. That He died for our sin. He gave His life for our sin. And we know what to do when we're confronted with sin. We go to the cross. Right? We say, Lord, this is me. Please forgive me!

And we know that He is right there to quickly and graciously forgive according to the promise it's given us in the Word of God. In 1 John 1:9, if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. That's a promise in God's Word. And we embrace it to the degree that when we are confronted with our sin, we're not condemned. Isn't that wild?

I wish I could confront people in their sin and not condemn them. But like I said, that's just not my gift. But God does it all the time. If you feel condemned, it's not God. Because in Christ there is no condemnation. Isn't that what the Bible... Isn't that what your Bible says? *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."* (Romans 3:8) Right?

If there's no condemnation and you're feeling condemned, where did it come from? Well, didn't come from God. He loves you. Yes, He confronts you, but He does not condemn you. He wants you to come to Him to repent so that He, that forgiveness will just envelop you. That's what He wants. And that's what these parables show. He's out looking for lost sheep so that He can embrace them.

One last passage here before we take communion. From the Book of Hebrews chapter 12. I love this.

Hebrews 12:2 (ESV)

...Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

...Jesus, (the writer says,) the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Do you guys understand? Jesus endured the cross because of the joy that was set before Him. What joy? The joy of you. You coming to Him, confessing your sin, being forgiven, and being made a child of God. That gave Him such joy that He was able to endure the cross, scorning its shame. What a beautiful passage.