

Rejoice, The Lost Is Found

-60

Luke 15:1-10

I want to read our whole passage for today at one time to give you the flow of it. In Luke 15:1-10, Luke says, "Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him..." referring to Jesus "...to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'" They were appalled that Jesus would meet with publicans and sinners and eat with them.

Verse 3, "So He spoke this parable to them, saying: '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?'" This is a rhetorical question expecting a "Yes" answer. If you lost one sheep, you would go and find 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."

Verse 8, "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."

Chapter 15 is actually the key to Luke's Gospel. It is the main theme of the entire Gospel, which is "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). And in this chapter, we have three, well-known and loved parables: the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, which we just read; and the parable of the lost sons, which is called the parable of the prodigal son, even though it is about both sons, who were lost and lost in different ways. The prodigal was guilty of sins of the flesh, and the other son was guilty of sins of the spirit, of pride and self-righteousness.

J.C. Ryle said, "This chapter is probably one chapter that has done more good for the souls of men than any other chapter in the Bible."

The theme that we see throughout this chapter is God's great love seeking sinners, seeking them to restore them and rejoice over them. So the great love and value that God places on sinners compels Him to pursue and seek them and find them. Someone said, "Who God seeks, He finds." And when He finds us, He puts us on His shoulders like a shepherd and brings us safely to heaven and rejoices at this one, lost sheep that has been found.

The story of the prodigal son has been called "the greatest, short story ever written." I like that story, because my life was that of a prodigal son. I was raised in church, fell away from the

Lord, but He sought me, pursued me, got ahold of me and saved me by His marvelous grace. He picked me up, put me on His shoulders, carried me all these years, and He will carry me safely home to heaven.

If you are a Christian, you are because Jesus sought you. God is more willing to save you than you are to be saved. God is seeking you, even when you are not seeking Him. And if you do seek Him, you only seek Him because He first sought you. Jesus loves you, He places value on you, and He is seeking that “which is lost.” The Son of God came for that purpose.

I want to break our text into three sections. This is a challenging chapter, because all three parables have the same message. He uses different stories to tell the same message of God’s love and redemption in seeking the lost sinners. The first section is in verses 1-3. In it we see the setting or background and the lost sinners who came to Jesus. “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.”

Back in chapter 14, at the end of verse 35, Jesus said, “He who has ears to hear; let him hear.” Then chapter 15, verse 1, says, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.”

Who were “the publicans,” in the King James translation? They were the tax collectors. They were Jews who were turncoats; they worked for the Roman government. They received a franchise district and had to collect an allotted amount of money for taxes to the Roman government. They worked for Rome, so they were hated by their fellow Jews. And any money they collected above their allotment, they were able to keep in their pocket. So they were kind of like the “Biblical Mafia.” They ripped people off by charging exorbitant amounts of money. They lived in luxury, were very worldly and were synonymous with ungodliness.

It’s interesting that Zacchaeus—his story we’ll get in Luke’s Gospel later—was the short man who climbed up the sycamore tree in order to see Jesus. He was a tax collector. He got saved and then said, “I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold” (Luke 19:8). So conversion had happened in Zacchaeus’ life.

So the tax collectors were despised. And verse 1 also said “sinners.” These were irreligious people; they weren’t following the law, they didn’t go to synagogue, they didn’t give any credence to the Scriptures. They were just secular, worldly, probably “party animals” or the unbelievers of their day. They came to hear Jesus. Why? Because Jesus loved them. And they said, “No one ever spoke like this Man!” (John 7:46). They were open to hearing what He had to say.

Jesus didn’t live in isolation; He ate with them and talked with them. He didn’t withdraw from them; He went to them. Not only do we see in these parables a window of who God is in His compassion and love for the lost and the value He placed on them, but we see an example that we should follow in that we should also pursue after the ungodly. We should reach out to them, love them and seek to win them to Christ.

Now who are “the Pharisees”? They were the religious. We’ve already been introduced to them in Luke’s Gospel. Whenever you have Pharisees and Jesus together, there’s an explosion, a conflict. The Pharisees were a self-righteous, religious sect of the Jews who were separatists. They will be seen in the oldest son in parable of the prodigal son. The Pharisees felt they were the only people going to heaven.

And the scribes were very scholarly, Jewish men who transcribed the Scriptures and interpreted the Word of God. They openly complained and murmured against Jesus. Verse 2, “And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’” I’m glad that Jesus receives sinners, because I am a sinner. But they said this in scorn, in spite, as an insult. They were disgusted. They spitefully meant that Jesus attracted sinners. And that was true, because there was no hypocrisy in Jesus; there was sincerity and love.

As Christians, we should be light and salt to the world. We shouldn’t live in isolation; we should actually connect to the world by wanting to win them to the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

This statement in verse 2 is actually the key to understanding the whole chapter. The parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin and the parable of the lost son/sons all were given in response to the statement that He “receives sinners and eats with them.” So this is why Jesus gave these parables.

Verse 3, “So He spoke this parable to them....” meaning the Pharisees, scribes and the multitudes who came to hear Him. Verse 1 said “all the tax collectors and the sinners.” So this was a huge crowd.

Notice the word “parable” in verse 3. It comes from the Greek word “parabole,” which means “to lay alongside.” It is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life, earthly story that is laid alongside a spiritual message. Jesus spoke in parables.

The three parables all basically teach the same thing. It is love for the lost and seeking them is joy, not only to God’s heart, but also to the angels of God in heaven.

I want to give three points in interpreting parables. Number one, whenever you interpret a parable, look for the context and the reason Jesus spoke it. Go back up in the text and then read beyond the text. Find out what issue Jesus was addressing. Always take a text in proper context.

So verse 2 is the key; the parables are going to be directed at this issue of Jesus receiving sinners and eating with them.

Number two, when interpreting parables, look for the main truth. Parables are basically given to convey one lesson.

And number three, you need to be careful that you don’t read into the parable doctrine that is not intended to be there. A parable is given to illustrate a doctrine but not to declare it. Be

careful not to build doctrine on a parable alone. Use the rest of Scripture— didactic or doctrinal letters—to teach doctrine.

The first parable is that of the lost sheep, verses 4-7. What a beautiful picture this is of Jesus, the Good Shepherd and how He seeks the lost sheep, finds it, puts it on His shoulders and brings it back rejoicing!

Verse 4, “What man of you, having a hundred sheep...” that would mean the man was not wealthy or poor but middle class “...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?” I like this. He doesn’t just go out for half an hour and then say, “Okay; this is past my bedtime. I’m going to go home and go to bed.”

If I were the shepherd, I would have said, “Dumb sheep! His fault. I’m not going to break my neck out at night trying to find him and fall off a cliff. Good riddance, you dumb sheep!” Not only that, but if I did go to seek the sheep and I found it, I wouldn’t put it on my shoulders; I’d kick it all the way home! Pray for me. Aren’t you glad I’m not the shepherd?

Jesus isn’t like this; He’s the Good Shepherd. Jesus said, “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:11). In the Greek, it says, “I am the Shepherd—the Good One.” I like that. There were bad shepherds. The bad shepherd is the one I just described—the one who kicks the sheep, who gives up on the sheep, who doesn’t care about the sheep or leads the sheep astray. But “The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (Luke 10:11). He gathers the sheep rather than scattering them.

And in the Greek it is very strong; he goes “after the one which is lost until he finds it.” And any shepherd worth his salt is going to put the 99 sheep in the fold after counting them coming through the gate. He misses one sheep, so he is going to go out at night to search after putting the sheep in the fold. Verse 5, “And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”

I read that in the early third century, one of the first statues ever found in a Christian catacomb was that of a shepherd with a sheep over his shoulders.

I brought back from Israel an olive-wood carving of a shepherd with a sheep over its shoulders. It’s in my office on a bookshelf.

So this is a very clear picture to us of how Jesus comes after us in love, He seeks us and when He finds us, brings us back rejoicing.

I’m sorry to say that sheep are dumb. And isn’t it interesting that that’s what we are. We’re sheep. They are helpless, defenseless and have no sense of direction. When you hear the word “sheep,” does it strike fear in your heart? Ever heard of an NFL football team called the Sheep? No; we have the Lions, the Bears, the Hawks and the Rams. Not the Sheep. It doesn’t speak of strength.

So we are helpless, weak, defenseless and lost. We're prone to wander. The Bible says, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way. And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

When the shepherd puts the sheep on his shoulder, it's a reminder that when Jesus died on the Cross, He took our sins. He died in our place. And He pursues us and comes after us.

the lost sheep and the lost coin were still viewed as valuable to the owners, to the shepherd and to the woman. This blew my mind and I pray that it would impact your heart.

Even in their sinful state, they were of value and desired by God. Even when you are running from God, even when you are lost and not following God, you are valuable to Him. The reason the shepherd went after the sheep was because of its value to God. We are all made in the image of God. As sinners, that image has been marred. But it has not been erased. Every human being has been made in the image of God and is valuable to God.

So we should never write anyone off. Never disregard anyone's need for Christ. We should be like the shepherd who seeks out those who are lost. Every human being starts off a lost sheep. And if you're saved today, you're saved because the shepherd sought you. And the reason you sought Him was because He first sought you. I sought Him because He sought me.

I like the words of John Newton's song, Amazing Grace:

"Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see."

I'm so glad that Jesus sought me! That Jesus found me! That Jesus rescued me! That Jesus bought me!

Are you glad? If you haven't come to Him today, I pray that like that lost sheep, you'll be found by the Good Shepherd. The sheep would be crying out in the night, and the shepherd would hear the sheep's cry, would go to the sheep and rescue it.

Notice what he does when he finds it, verse 5. "He lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing." Always the result of finding that "which is lost" is rejoicing. When you find something you lost and you find it, you don't complain. You don't get bummed out. You rejoice.

Now notice the three, key words in verse 6: "rejoice...found...lost." And these words would logically come in the reverse; we are first "lost." Then we are "found." And as a result we "rejoice." "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."

Then the application is in verse 7. Whenever Jesus uses the phrase "I say to you," we need to

listen very carefully. "I say to you that likewise..." in the same way the shepherd had all this joy over finding the lost sheep and celebrated "...there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner..." the sheep represents a sinner "...who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."

What does Jesus mean by "ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance"? Don't we all need to repent? Yes. Jesus is basically saying here that the Pharisees and scribes don't see their need to repent, don't see their need of a Savior, because they don't see themselves as lost. So there is no joy over them; they don't see their need for repentance.

One of the worst things that could happen to anyone is for them to not see their need for salvation, to not see their need of a Savior, to not see their need to be found, to not know that they are lost. We all are lost and need to be found by God, who created you and made you for the purpose of fellowship with Him and to enjoy Him forever.

But those who repent bring great joy in heaven. Heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents. "Repent" means "to change your mind." It's the Greek word "metanoia." It means you change your mind about Jesus, about your sin and about what you need to do. You need to trust Him as your Savior, turn from your sins, trust in Jesus Christ and you are saved.

The second parable is in verses 8-10. It is the parable of the lost coin. We had the lost sinners, in verses 1-3, and then we had the parable of the lost sheep, in verses 4-7. The parable of the lost coin is called the lost silver, in verse 8. The coin was actually Greek; it wasn't the Roman denarii. It was a coin that had a value of about one day's wage. "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."

The first parable would get the attention of the guys; it's about shepherds at nighttime roaming the hills, finding the sheep and bringing it back on their shoulders. They're happy and celebrating.

The second parable is about a woman, so the ladies take great interest in this story. She had ten pieces of silver. We can't be sure, but some Bible scholars feel it is possible that this was her dowry. It was common in those days that women would take those specific, square, Greek coins and make a necklace out of them. It would be like women today wearing an engagement or wedding ring. Or they would string them across their forehead as a headband.

We first had a shepherd who had 100 sheep, and one is lost, so he goes out to find it. Now we have this woman who lost one of the ten coins. She diligently seeks after it until she finds it. She lit the lamp, swept the house and, using a strong phrase, "seek[s] diligently" in the King James translation. She wasn't casual or apathetic about it and doesn't give a quick glance. She was diligent in her search "until she finds it."

In those days, homes were very dimly lit. They didn't have electricity or large windows. Most homes had no windows and only one, low doorway. They had dirt floors with straw or hay. So if you lost a coin, it would be very difficult to find it. But this woman went to great lengths of time and expense to find the coin.

I just would have said, "Whatever. You just lost one coin. No big deal; you've got nine left."

When I was in Israel right after my wife and I got married, I lost my wedding ring—about two months after we got married—in the Mediterranean Sea. We had snorkels and masks and looked for it as best we could, but we couldn't find it. But had I found that ring, I would have celebrated.

A couple of years ago, someone gave me a \$20 In-N-Out gift card. Praise Jehovah! I was on my way to In-N-Out so stoked that I was going to have this awesome In-N-Out meal! When I got out of the car, I grabbed the trash from the bottom of the door of my car and put it in the same hand where I held the gift card. At the time I wasn't thinking and just threw it in the trash can. I went to pay for my meal and couldn't find my gift card, so I cancelled my order. Then I realized I must have thrown it away with the trash.

So I went to the trash at In-N-Out, opened the door of the bin and rummaged in the trash can. People were looking at me. "Isn't that Pastor Miller?! The offerings must be low this week. He's dumpster-diving at In-N-Out! How sad." People came to me and wondered what I was doing. I told them, "I lost a \$20 gift card! Please help me find it!" And I finally found the card. To add to the symbolism, it was covered in ketchup. I said, "Praise God! The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin! It's been redeemed by the blood!" I was so stoked! The whole restaurant clapped. "Hooray! Pastor Miller gets to eat today!"

This woman was sweeping the house and looking around until she finally found her coin. Then she called all her friends and said, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!"

The shepherd in the first parable is a picture of Jesus. The woman in the second parable is a picture of God, no doubt—the Holy Spirit, perhaps, who speaks to us, convicts us, draws us, illuminates our hearts and shows us our need. And some say in the parable of the prodigal son we have a clear picture of God the Father. Whether or not that is intended in the three parables, I don't know. But we see the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit all involved in the salvation of sinners.

The point is driven home; the same words we find in verse 7 we find in verse 10. "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." In verse 7, He said "over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." And I believe that means those who don't see their need for repentance, so they don't repent. They don't know they're lost, so they don't see that they need to be found.

All of humanity is lost until they're found. So the point of this parable is that we're all lost in our sins. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "There is none

righteous, no, not one" (Romans 3:10). "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). But Jesus comes seeking us and finds us. He is the seeking Savior.

As I look back at my conversion, I'll never forget the way God began to convict me and speak to me and draw me with those cords of love. He made me realize how needy I was, how lost I was. I thank God to this day for doing that for me. Then He brought me to repentance. I'll never forget the day I sat on a lonely, deserted stretch of beach in Ventura. It was in August, but I don't remember the date, in 1971. And I wept and wept tears of repentance and turned back to God. I felt "the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). That began my walk with God as He carried me and will carry me all the way to heaven.

What a blessing it is that He seeks us and He finds us! Yes, we repent, but it is God who seeks us. And then what happens? He rejoices.

Again, I point out those three words, in verse 6, that are in verse 9: "rejoice...found...lost." The word "lost" appears five times in these first, 10 verses. The word "found" appears six times. And the word "rejoice" or "joy" appears five times. So we see the heart of God; that He values lost sinners made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). That's God's heart for you today.

We also have a need to emulate that, to be like God. Parables do two things: they are windows through which we can see God—His compassion and love for the lost in seeking them—and they are mirrors that we look into to see ourselves. So we need to see ourselves as the lost sheep and as the lost coin; that we need to be found by God. And we do that by repentance and then faith in Jesus Christ. And we also need to go out and emulate the heart of God in seeking to win lost sinners to Jesus Christ.