**God Rejoices When One Sinner Repents**

August 16, 2015

Luke 15:1-10

Key Verse 15:7 “I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous person who do not need to repent.”

Luke 15 is one of the greatest chapters in the entire Bible. It contains three parables about things that were lost and then found. The first parable is about a lost sheep and the shepherd who goes out to rescue it. The second parable is about a lost coin and the woman who searched frantically for it. The third story is called the Parable of the Prodigal Son and is the most familiar of the three. It’s about a son who becomes lost to his father. The theme connecting these three parables is when that which is lost is found, there is great rejoicing. What is it that makes heaven happy? In all three of these parables, Jesus says that there is great rejoicing in heaven when one person turns from their sins and puts their faith in Jesus Christ. The world may be impressed when we build a huge church, but the heaven does not celebrate too much when a church is built. The world may be impressed when someone wins a Nobel prize, but the heaven does not celebrate it.

The world may be impressed with gathering of half million youths from all over the world for World Youth Day 2002 with Pope John Paul II, but Jesus never said there was joy in the presence of angels over half million youths gathering for Bible Study. He did say, not once, not twice, but three times there is great joy in heaven when one person repents and turns to God.

Look at verse 1. “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.”

Even though Jesus rebuked their sins, tax collectors and sinners acknowledged that he was right. In true repentance, they acknowledged him as Lord. Wherever Jesus found people who were willing to acknowledge their sin, he accepted them and offered spiritual help and blessings upon them. The Pharisees resented the fact that Jesus welcomed sinners. They thought that it was blame-worthy, but it was in fulfillment of the very purpose for which Jesus came into the world. Luke 19:10 says, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” It was in answer to their charge that Jesus told the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. These stories were aimed directly at the Pharisees, who were never broken before God to admit their lost condition. As a matter of fact, they were as lost as the tax collectors, but they steadfastly refused to admit it. The point of the three stories is that God receives real joy and satisfaction when he sees sinners repenting, whereas he obtains no gratification from self-righteous hypocrites who are too proud to admit their wretched sinfulness.

Look at verses 3-4. “Then Jesus told them this parable: ‘Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?’” In the parable, God is the Shepherd, and the lost sheep represents us.

There are three words that describe sheep: They are dumb, defenseless, and directionless. Almost all animals have either claws, sharp teeth, a hard shell, or speed to escape predators–but not a sheep–they have no defenses. Sheep get lost easily, too. There are homing pigeons, and cats and dogs can often find their way back home, but sheep are clueless about how to find their own way back home. Sheep are stupid. If they fall over on their side, they can’t get up by themselves. So the sheep that’s wandered off would be in danger from predators, in danger from a fall, from exhaustion, from dehydration. All kinds of potential issues could beset that lost sheep. They say that when sheep become afraid...and they do, they get very nervous and very fearful...they lie down and die. That’s right. They can’t get up. They become so despondent and discouraged.

In many respects, we are the same way in our ability to rescue ourselves from our lost condition. We are dumb, defenseless, and directionless. Like sheep, we all have a tendency to stray away from God. Isaiah 53:6 says, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

People are lost because of their proneness to wander. Thinking that life will be better outside and beyond the sheepfold and care of the Shepherd, they begin to work their way free from all restraint. We all have experienced this process to one degree or another. Feeling lost in the multiplicity of alternatives and having no clear conviction of where our lives are headed and how each challenge or opportunity fits into a greater plan, we begin to nibble. Nibbling here and there, we graze ourselves into a state and condition of lostness. Finally, having gone so far that we don’t know how to get back home or we do not want to return home because we feel guilt over what we have done in the process of straying away. So being lost is living life without a central purpose and a tendency to wander aimlessly away from the God who made us.

It can be scary to be lost. How many of you have ever been in a strange building or city and gotten lost? Earlier this year, Jacob and I went to Ottawa on a snowy day. When I left Ottawa, my car almost ran out of gas and I was desperately looking for a gas station. But I got lost, and I circled around the remote area for 20 minutes. I was afraid that I would be stuck on a snowy road without gas. It was very stressful. Probably you had many such fearful experiences. It can be a distressing experience, but you were only lost temporarily, because you are here today! In this passage Jesus uses the word “lost” to speak of the spiritual condition of being eternally lost. The word L-O-S-T is one of the scariest four lettered words in the human language. A lost soul is the most tragic condition in life. You can lose your mind, and it’s not as tragic as a lost soul. You can lose your character, and it’s not as bad as a losing your soul. You can lose your direction in life, and it is not as bad as a losing your soul because a lost soul is for eternity. We are all like a lost sheep at one time in our lives. Jesus can never find you until you admit you are a lost sinner. The worst kind of being lost is not having a clue that you are lost at all. This was the case with the religious leaders. They were lost and didn’t know it.

We learn also from this parable that God allows us to get lost. He lets us wander away, hoping that weariness and despair will turn us around. Also sometimes, God strikes us so that we may not wander and hurt ourselves. Has it occurred to you that the thwarting of your dreams; the foiling of your best-laid plans; the dashing of your hopes could be the work of the Good Shepherd who strikes us to prevent us from wandering for our own good?

The shepherd had 100 sheep. Just before he was ready to bed them down, he began to count them, “...95, 96, 97, 98, 99...Whoa, I’m missing one! Hey, where’s Snowflake? I haven’t seen her all afternoon.” The Shepherd counts the sheep. How else would he discover that one sheep in a group of 100 is missing? You must count the sheep and know the sheep. He knows who is lost. He knows their name. When he learned that Snowflake is missing, the Shepherd does something surprising, he leaves the other 99 sheep and sets off to find the single lost sheep. The Shepherd never underestimates the value of one.

Have you ever heard the statement, “The needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few or the one?” Mr. Spock said that in one of the Star Trek movies. Jesus never said anything like that. God is concerned with one person. Now, many people think the shepherd is foolish to leave the 99 sheep in order to search for one lamb. After all, you have to factor in business loss, what’s the big deal if one is lost? You still have the 99—it is only a 1% loss! But with God, every individual matters. If the shepherd had 10,000 sheep and one was lost, I believe he would have left the 9,999 and gone after the one. Why? Because it is the character of our God to love the individual and to seek the lost. If you were the only person on earth who was lost and needed a Savior, I think Jesus would have still come to earth and died on a cross for your sins. That’s why Jesus came to earth.

Notice what happened when the shepherd found the lost sheep. He didn’t rebuke the sheep or take a whip and drive the sheep back to the flock. Instead, the shepherd picked up the sheep and carried him on his shoulder all the way back home. He carries us home. Won’t you let the shepherd pick you up today and carry you home? The lost sheep enjoys the intimacy with the shepherd. She experienced the love of her shepherd. After that, she will be the model sheep of the entire flock. No other sheep will hear his voice so quickly nor follow so closely. Instead of leading the others away, he will be an example of devotion and obedience. In short, a complete change will come into the life of this wayward sheep. She will have learned obedience through her sufferings.

In the second parable, it’s not a sheep that has wandered off on its own; it’s a coin that has been accidentally lost. The woman had ten coins and one of them was lost. The word Jesus used was for a coin that didn’t have much monetary value at the time. However, most scholars believe this coin was part of a headdress brides wore. Jewish brides often wore a headdress of ten coins strung across their foreheads. So the coin had great sentimental value because it was part of her wedding vows. That’s why she literally turned her house upside down to find it.

What did the woman do about her lost coin? Look at verse 8. “Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?” She could not sleep because of the lost coin. So, no one else in the house could sleep either! She carefully looked under the bed many times and in the cracks and crevices of the couch and her husband’s pants and coat over and over again. Finally, in the corner way under a table she sees the glimmer of her lost coin and her heart leaps with joy. “Aha! I found it!” Her husband said, “Great honey, now let’s go to sleep!” But she did not go to sleep. Look at verse 9. “And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, “Rejoice with me! I have found my lost coin!” The woman was joyful because she had found her precious long lost coin. She was so joyful that she gathered all her neighbors together and they had a late night celebration with cake and ice cream. Everyone rejoiced because of the woman’s joy. After that every day she took out her coin and looked at it and rejoiced.

Jesus is teaching us that God is like a shepherd who goes searching for one little lost sheep, and when he finds him, God celebrates! God is like the woman who turns her house upside down to find the one lost coin–and when God finds that lost person, there is a party. In the next parable, we are going to see that God is like a loving Father who grieves when a son walks away, but when the son returns, there is celebration. Look ahead to the last verse in chapter 15 to see why God celebrates. In verse 32 the father of the lost son says, “But we HAD to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

Have you ever admitted you were lost before Jesus found you? Do you realize how miserable and depraved you were before you repented and accepted God’s love? You’ll never truly celebrate and appreciate God’s grace until you realize how terrible it is to be lost. If you are lost today, you can be found. God is seeking and searching for you. He loves you so much that Jesus came and died on the cross for your sins. All we need to do is to repent. Look at verse 7 again. “…over one sinner who repents.” The sheep is helpless, the sheep is near dead, can do nothing, has to be picked up, put on the shepherd’s shoulders and carried back. The shepherd carries the full burden, the full weight of the search, the find, the recovery and the restoration. The coin is inanimate, helpless, dead, lifeless. The woman has to do the finding and the restoration. But Jesus makes this very clear that this does not happen without repentance. Namely, admitting that we are lost, and accept God’s grace. We will learn what repentance looks like in the parable of the lost son in the next week.

Look at verse 7 again. “I tell you that in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” The last line is pure sarcasm. The Pharisees were deluded into thinking they needed no repentance. They never knew the heart of God. They knew nothing of shepherding. In fact, they were so far from God that when he sent his own Great Shepherd, they killed him. That’s how far they were from God. They didn’t know that the heart of God was to rescue sinners, to come all the way down to earth to embrace them and pick them up in their hopelessness and bring them into his own presence. They thought that to be like God meant you didn’t associate with those people. The Pharisees separated themselves from everybody that they thought would in any way pollute them or corrupt or defile them. It is so tragic.

If you are one of those lost sheep, it is time for you to cry out to the Good Shepherd. Call out to Him, ask him to be merciful and to pick you up and carry you to the Father. If you are a Christian but your priorities are all messed up, it is time for you to ask God to give you heaven’s joy in spending your life for the purpose of finding the lost. Let’s learn God’s heart for lost sinners, and pray for lost sinners. Let’s find one lost sinner.