

The Parable of the Lost and Found

Luke 15:1-32

Considering the Whole

- It is important to note that all these three “parables” are really just one parable. Lk. 15:3 – “*And he spake this parable unto them...*” They all three are laid down together for the explanation of one key truth.
- Each parable considers a possession that has been lost: a *sheep* belonging to the Shepherd, a *coin* belonging to a woman, and a *son* belonging to his father.
- Each possession is of considerable value to owner because they are things that are worth looking for. Objects of the owners love.
- As was pointed out to me recently: all these illustrate the *value of ONE*. One is valuable to the Lord. As the saying goes: “*If you were the only person on planet earth, Jesus Christ still would've come and died for you.*” Each one is precious to God. Whether it is 1/2 sons, 1/10 coins, or 1/100 sheep each ONE is valuable to God.
- As Charlie pointed out this morning: In the first *parable* we have one *lost outside the house*. In the second *parable* one lost *inside the house* and lastly both lost *one inside and one outside*.
- The first two “parables” clearly state the purpose of the parable: “*I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*” – 15:7, 10. However, the third parable explains thoroughly the *repentance* of the son and the *joy* the Father receives in response.
- The first two parable shows that *God seeking out sinners* and the third shows God’s longsuffering and patient waiting for the sinner to come home.

Considering the Context and Audience

- Luke 14:25-35 – Jesus just gave His most lengthy discourse on true discipleship and the cost involved in being a follower of Jesus. He concluded by saying: “*He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.*” V35. His message was to anyone that would hear!
- Ignoring the chapter division we read in 15:1 – “*Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.*” They had *ears to hear*.

- However (v2), they are contrasted with the Scribes and Pharisees who “*...murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.*” They did not have *ears to hear* but rather *tongues to murmur*.
- **The Pharisees:** The word Pharisee means *separatist*. Pharisees were a group of religious leaders who had a positive zeal for the law but a very negative application of it. They were hypocritical and very self-righteous. Their *separation* was not Biblical-separation, but the addition of man-made traditions! Some of their traditions taught: “*Let not a man associate with the wicked, not even to bring him to the law.*” (Strack-Billerbeck, II, 208).
- **Scribes:** Were interpreters and copyists of the law and tradition. They were skilled in the law and were similar to lawyers. They worked in very close relationship to the Pharisees, so close that Jesus condemned them together – Matt. 23 – “*Woe unto you scribes, and Pharisees.*”
- **Publicans and Sinners:** Publicans were tax collectors who were mainly Jewish and were working for the Roman government. They were hated of their own countrymen and were despised. They were notoriously crooked in their practice dishonestly collecting more than required thus thieving off others for themselves. Sinners referred to the generally immoral and societies base. They included *prostitutes, thieves, murderers, adulterers, drunkards* etc.

The Central Truth

- The central truth of the parable is clear: *God rejoices when sinners repent.* These series of parables are in direct response to the murmuring of the Pharisees toward Jesus’ receiving of and eating with sinners. Jesus is showing both Pharisees/scribes and publicans/sinners that there is a God in heaven that receives sinners.
- These *sinners* are lost and need to be found they are valuable to God.
- It has been believed that the Pharisees taught that “*there is joy before God when those who provoke him perish from the world.*” This is similar to the thinking of some hyper-Calvinists.

1. The Lost Sheep – v3-7

a. **The Sheep**

- i. Here are 100 sheep and *one* goes missing. A missing sheep is in dangerous territory and without the watch care of the shepherd he is vulnerable and open to attack.

- ii. Sheep are prone to go missing. They go on “walkabouts” and are easily distracted. This is portrayed in Isaiah 53:6 – “*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*”
- iii. “*No creature strays more easily than a sheep; none is more heedless; and none so incapable of finding its way back to the flock, when once gone astray: it will bleat for the flock, and still run on in an opposite direction to the place where the flock is: this I have often noticed.*” (Clarke)
- iv. Man is likened to *lost sheep* that have lost their way in sin and degradation.

b. The Shepherd

- i. V4 – Jesus poses a rhetorical question to all his audience: v4- “*What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it.?*”
- 1. *What man of you* – Hypothetically supposing that you cared for sheep. This could either refer to a hired shepherd who were stewards of the master’s sheep and responsible for not bringing home all the flock, or an owner/shepherd who simply cares for his own sheep. It is mostly likely an *owner shepherd* due to the shepherd saying “my sheep” (v6). Here we see: **the responsibility of the shepherd.**
- 2. *Doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness* – He leaves those that are in *safety* to seek after the one which is in danger. Here we see: **the care of the shepherd.**
 - a. The shepherd does the seeking out of the sheep, not the sheep the Shepherd.
 - i. *There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.* Romans 3:11
 - ii. *No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.* John 6:44
 - iii. *For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.* Luke 19:10. He was doing the will of the Father which is to seek out the lost. Even though the Son has ascended God still through the gospel and his servants is seeking out the lost sheep.
 - 3. *Until he find it?* – He will not give up until he finds the sheep. Here is **the determination of the shepherd.**

Note: The shepherd can either refer to Christ or God the Father. Comparing Scripture with Scripture we see that Jesus is the “good shepherd” – Jn. 10:11. However contextually it refers to the Father, this is seen by conclusion which compares the joy of the Father and the joy of the Shepherd. This is the main central truth that *God joyfully receives repentant sinners*. However, both are possible.

c. The Celebration

- i. V5-6 – The restoration of the sheep and the response of the shepherd.
 1. *V5 - When he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing* – It is the joy of the shepherd to find the sheep. He bears the sheep safely upon his shoulders giving it rest and repose. There is no mention of scolding, or punishment. Just only joy in His heart.
 2. *V6 – And when he cometh home, he calleth...Rejoice with me for I have found my sheep which was lost.* He brings the sheep home, and calls his friends and neighbours. All are to be partakers of His joy.
- ii. *V7 - ...likewise joy shall be in heaven...* - He drives home the truth of the parable. Just as the shepherd is so happy to find ONE lost sheep so God in heaven rejoices over one sinner that repents **more than ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance v7b.**
 1. The latter part of v7 could either echo Luke 5:32, “*I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.*” Referring to the Pharisees who thought they were the “sheep of God” in God’s sheepfold.
 2. Otherwise it could refer to those who are genuinely saved and need not conversion. Therefore the meaning would be that God is not only interested in those who are “his children” but is also concerned for those of His that are lost in sin.

2. The Lost Coin – v8-10

a. The Woman

- i. Some have suggested that she was a poor peasant woman of the Syrian village and that the coins represented her savings. Others think that these coins may have been made into a necklace or headband ornament worn by newly wedded women signifying that she was now a wife.
 1. Some suggest the woman is poor by fact that she had to light a candle and sweep the house to find the coin. Thus indicating that she lived in a poorer type house which had no windows and mud type floor. We cannot be certain. These details are unimportant to the whole.

b. The Coin

- i. Ten pieces of silver –*drachma* – One drachma is equivalent to approximately a day's labour. However this is disputed. It is only the time *drachma* is used in the N.T. A double *drachma* was the temple tax mentioned in Matt. 17:24
- ii. Either way whether poor or average this coin was very valuable to the woman and this is noted by the diligence of her search.
- iii. V8 – *...light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently...* - lighting of the candle to produce the right light for the search, sweeping to make sure every part of the floor has been “touched”, and seeks *carefully* to make sure nothing is missed. The words *sweeps* and *seeks* are in the present tense indicating that she keeps on *sweeping* and *seeking* until she finds it.
 1. This utmost diligence teaches us that God is very concerned for sinners and that He takes utmost care and concern in trying to “find” them.

c. The Rejoicing

- i. V9 – *And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.* Whenever something is lost there is great joy when it is found, especially after diligent searching to find it.
 1. This woman calling her friends and neighbours indicates that she wanted those who were closest to her to rejoice in what she was joying over. Would the Pharisees joy in the things God joyed over (sinners found)? Would they join the celebration or continue to murmur?
- ii. V10 – *There is joy in the presence of the angels of God...* cf. v7 – *Joy shall be in heaven.* These are references to the rejoicing of God. Heaven is where God is and as the same way the Kingdom of Heaven and God are synonymous so rejoicing in heaven would include God. Also v10 seems to indicate that God is rejoicing in the presence of the angels!

Note: Some people claim that the *woman* here represents the Holy Spirit. They say this for several reasons (1) The Shepherd in the 1st parable is Jesus, the Father in the last parable is our Heavenly Father and therefore the Holy Spirit fits the 2nd parable. (2) The diligent search of the Spirit with the lamp light of God's Word sweeps the obstacles out of the way in order to find the sinner.

Note: Some commentators suggest that the coin would've had the image of the Emperor upon it and therefore represents lost man as bearing the image of the Father even though it has been marred by sin.

3. The Lost Son – v11-32

a. **The Situation**

- i. This parable has something to say to both the *publicans and sinners* and also the *Pharisees* and *scribes*. This certain man had *two sons*.
- ii. V11 – A certain man had two sons
 1. **The Prodigal Son** – represents mankind, the human race, unbelievers. Cf. Acts 17:27-29; Malachi 2:10 – “*Have we all not one father? Hath not God created us?*” There is a sense where via creation we are all the “children of God.” However spiritually this is not the case. Jesus said to the Pharisees “*ye are of your father the devil.*” Jn. 8:44; Matt. 13:38 – the tares are called “*the children of the wicked one.*” And a very conclusive verse on this is 1 John 3:9-10: “*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*”
 2. **The Elder Brother** – Represents the *attitude* of the murmuring religious leaders.
- iii. V12-13 – The younger son asks for his inheritance. The father divides unto **them** their share. The younger son wastes all his substance on riotous living.
 1. This request for an *early* inheritance was as if he was saying to his father “*I wish you were dead.*” The son was NOT entitled to an early inheritance while his father was still alive. It was a *gracious* act of the Father not to *force, coerce, or manipulate* his son to stay. This shows us that God does not stifle man’s free will but allows man to exercise his free will even if it is against God’s perfect will.
 - iv. V14 – A famine arises in the country and becomes poverty stricken
 - v. V15-16 – He works for a pig farmer and feeds the pigs. He gets so hungry that he covets the pig food.
 - vi. V17-19 – He repents – acknowledging his wrong and decides to return
 - vii. V20 – He comes back to his father. The father runs to meet him.

- viii. V21 -22 – He confesses and his father blesses – dresses him, puts a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet.
- ix. V23-24 – There is a feast of rejoicing.
- x. V25-32 – His elder brother murmurs.

b. The Rebellion – v13-16

- i. **Wilfulness of the son:** v13 – The son made up his *mind* and had a *plan*. It was “*...not many days after...*” that he gathered all together. Not many days but enough time to think, this was not unintended this was *rebellion*. He went into a *far country*. A place where he could run away from his *identity* and everything that he once lived for.
- ii. **Wasted substance:** v13, 14a – He spent all that he had. Cf. v30 – “*He devoured his living with harlots...*” This may not be exactly true as it was the accusation of the elder jealous brother. However the *mighty famine* brought him to a place of need – God sends mighty famines into the lives of the rebellious as a way of getting them to come home!
- iii. **Working in the slums:** v15-16 – He got a job the in pig fields feeding pigs. He got to the point where he *would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat*. The word *fain* means he *longed for, set his heart upon, desired*. This is how degraded his condition became. Not only in the pig’s pen, but now desiring the pig’s food.
 - 1. A pig is a very unclean animal and the Jews would have nothing to do with pigs in fact a rabbinical saying went something like this: “*cursed be the man who would breed swine.*” This was the most degrading employment. Even amongst the Egyptians the pig famers were completely shut out from society.
- iv. This was where his rebellion led him to. So this is why the publicans and sinners are where they are.

c. The Repentance – v17 - 20

- i. This is one of the best illustrations of repentance even though the word isn’t used. This is what happens in the sinner’s heart that brings joy to the Father’s face!
 - 1. V17 – “He came to himself...” – His conscience/senses was awakened.
 - 2. V18 – “I will arise and go to my father...” – Change of mind and heart.
 - 3. V18 – “I have sinned against heaven...” – Contrition and confession.
 - 4. V19 – “no more worthy to be called thy son...” – Comprehension of his state.

5. V19 – “make me as one of thy hired servants...” – Humility.
Brokenness.
- ii. We know his repentance was true because of v20 – “*He arose and came to his father...*”
1. The fruit of his repentance was the *arising* and *going to His father* – “Fruits meet for repentance” – “Bring forth fruits worthy of repentance...” “Do works meet for repentance...”
- D.L. Moody – “*Man is born with his face turned away from God. When he truly repents, he is turned right round toward God; he leaves his old life.*”
- d. The Rejoicing – v20 - 24**
- i. Here is the rejoicing that answers to the Pharisees murmuring.
 1. V20 – His father saw him while he was a great way off: *Eagerness*
 2. V20 - The Father ran to him: *Excitement and joy*
 3. V20 – Embraced and kissed him fervently – *Affection and love*
 4. V22 - Rags exchanged for the best robe. *An honouring.*
 5. V22 - Beggar treated like royalty – Ring – *Authority*
 6. V22 - Bare footed (servant) – shoes (son) - *Sonship*
 7. V23 – Kill the fatted calf – *Celebration.*
 - ii. “For this my son **was dead**, and is **alive again**; he was **lost**, and **is found**. And they began to be merry.” Luke 15:24
- e. The Murmuring – v25-32**
- i. V25 – 27 – Upon hearing the news of his brother’s coming and his father celebrating he was filled with anger. No doubt this was a jealous rage.
 - ii. V28 – ...*and would not go in: therefore his father came out...* The elder brother refused to walk into the celebration! He would separate (Pharisee/separatism gone wrong) entirely from any rejoicing over repentant sinners. His father then graciously comes to him. He had gone out to meet his *prodigal* and now goes out to meet *another lost son*.
 - iii. V29 – Notice his self-righteousness – “*these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment.*” He refers to serving his father, as one man says: “*He did not really understand what being a son means. That is why perhaps he didn't understand what being a father means. He could not see why his father should be full of joy at the return of the prodigal.*”
 - iv. *Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.* Galatians 4:7

- v. V29 –30 Notice his jealousy – “*and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.*” Where is my recognition?
- vi. V31 – *Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine* – This reveals to us that the Pharisees and scribes have been privileged more than the Publicans and sinners. They were guardians of the covenants and the Law. Romans 9:3-5. They were there in the *temple* reading, hearing and teaching the Law and Prophets.
 - 1. J. Dwight Pentecost. “*This elder brother had been born to privilege and fellowship but had never experienced what was available to him. His heart was not the heart of a son, but that of a hireling servant. He had never entered into fellowship with his father even though he received his father's blessings. He did not show the heart of his father that welcomed the sinner but rather showed the hardness of his heart by his rejection of the one who returned.*” Was he really part of the family?
- vii. V32 – *It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad.* – The words *it was meet* mean not that it was just a “good idea” but rather necessary. It is translated in other places as *must, ought, behoved, needful*.
 - 1. Jesus is driving home the point here. There should be and must be joy and reception of repentant sinners. It is only a natural way to respond to the return of publicans and sinners! For this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found!

Conclusion:

In answer to the Pharisees disapproval of Christ receiving publicans and sinners, Jesus gives three illustrative parables that show that God in heaven rejoices when sinners are saved. When that which was lost is found, the heavens rejoice and so should we!

I like what Warren Wiersbe said: “*Everybody in this chapter experienced joy except the elder brother. The Shepherd, the woman, and their friends all experienced the joy of finding. The younger son experienced the joy of returning and being received by a loving, gracious father...Don't stand outside! Come in and enjoy the feast!*”

Memory Verse:

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Luke 15:10
