

Luke 15:1-10

“Seeking and Saving Sinners”

Be it for the lost sinner, or the straying saint Luke 15 contains some of the greatest words of encouragement in the entire bible. It's portrays a picture (in parable form) of the heart of God toward the lost, toward the struggling and toward the straying. It's a reminder of why Christ came, to seek and to save that which was lost. That's the heart of God toward you and toward me, to seek us out and to save us from the penalty of our own ways, the penalty of our sin against Him.

In virtually every type of terrain there is a search and rescue team poised, prepared and ready to go. Maritime, mountainous, swift water, wilderness it doesn't matter, if you're trapped or in trouble there is a search and rescue team ready to rock... Well, the preaching of the gospel, compelling people to come to Christ is what we might consider to be Spiritual search and rescue. Some people are able to discern the danger that they're in and they'll reach out for the lifeline, others *don't realize* the danger they're in but they need rescued just the same. But if you're a Christian you're a member Christ's all volunteer Spiritual search and rescue team as He's searching after the lost and seeking to save them through you...

Now often times the search and rescue teams invoke extraordinary and heroic measures in order to save someone because if they fail the person will perish. Jesus did exactly that; leaving heaven, becoming a Man, subjecting Himself to His own creation, being brutally beaten, nailed to a cross and dying for the sin of the world is what I would consider to be an extraordinary and heroic measure in order to prevent us from perishing.

Well to set the scene perhaps you can recall the fact that Jesus has just laid it on the line concerning the call to be His disciple. As it pertains to salvation the door is open wide, come one come all, God wants heaven to be filled up and if you will turn from your sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved.

It's that simple, God loves you that much, there's no way He could have made it any easier. All you have to do is trust in finished work of the cross of Jesus Christ on your behalf. But when it comes to the call of being His disciple well now there's a cost to count. If you don't place Jesus as the highest priority of your life, if you're not able to take up your cross, sacrifice your will, your wants, lay your life down for Him serving others in order that you might glorify Him and that they might be drawn to Him than you cannot be His disciple.

Salt is good, but if it loses it's flavor it's good for nothing. So to a Christian with out the nature of Christ, he/she isn't doing anyone any good. Jesus rounded out His call to consider what it means to be His disciple with the familiar appeal, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" Check it out...

Vs 1-2

I want you to follow the flow and see the scene here. Jesus just gave this hardcore life lesson regarding the call to discipleship. Then He says, "If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!" Then who was it that drew near to him in order to *hear* Him? It was the tax collectors and sinners! Now I guess what makes this all the more radical is the reality of what's meant by the phrase "ears to hear". Because the same word that Jesus used in Vs 35 of Luke 14 is the exact same word that Luke employed in Vs 1 of Ch 15.

Jesus isn't simply saying, "If you're not deaf, you should be listening." The word "hear" here is rich with spiritual connotation. I looked it up in the Theological Dictionary of the NT and this is what it said, "The use of ἀκούω and its derivatives in the NT reflects something of the significance of the Word as it is spoken and as it is to be heard in the reciprocal NT relationship between God and man. The hearing of man represents correspondence to the revelation of the Word, and in biblical religion it is thus the essential form in which this divine revelation is appropriated.¹"

¹ *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley and G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

In other words Jesus is saying, “If you’re ready to respond to the call of discipleship, now’s the time.” It was an altar call of sorts. Then, much to our shock and chagrin, it was the *tax collectors and sinners* that drew near to Him in order to hear and be *changed* while all that the scribes and Pharisees did was sit back and *complain!*

Religion is *repulsed* by Jesus: but sinners, those with out hope being with out God in the world readily/eagerly *received* Jesus. There was something about our Lord, something so seemingly irresistible in the way He lived His life, shared His message and showed His love for people that He was like a magnet to sinners who knew that they weren’t right with God and needed to be. Religious people, people who thought they were just fine apart from Christ were offended by the company that Jesus would keep.

Now lets think about that for just a minute, how is it that you perceive “obviously” sinful people? Do you try and avoid them, are you offended to be around them, or does your heart go out in compassion toward them, do you see them as sheep in need of a Shepherd, lost and lonely in a hurt and dying world?

Lost sinners came to Christ...not because He catered to them, He never compromised His message, but He *cared* for them, had *compassion* upon them and offered them hope. The Pharisees criticized them and tried to keep their distance; they had a desire for personal purity but no love for lost souls... Think it through, who are you more like? Do you look upon the lost with contempt or with compassion?

Our Lord extended the opportunity to come to Him just as you were. You didn’t need to change anything, just come. Now He loves us too much to *leave* us the way we are, but He *receives* us the way we are nonetheless. Remember these words? “*Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*” Matthew 11:28 If you’re worn down and weary of the ways of this world, of the things of this world then come to Jesus and you’ll find rest, rest for your soul.

“All the tax collectors and sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.” What a beautiful thing we have happening here. May the same thing be said of us. That we even now are drawing near to Christ to *hear* Him. That is, that we would take *in* be changed *by* and appropriate the things He reveals to us.

Yet in Vs 2 we have the sad indictment; that as the sinners were *coming* the scribes and Pharisees were *complaining*...saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” Hey, Praise God! Btw this word, “Complained” is the same word translated from the Hebrew into the Greek that described the way the children of Israel were murmuring and complaining against God and Moses in the desert.

It’s interesting how many things Jesus’ enemies said about Him that though they were meant to be words *against* Him were in reality profound insights *concerning* Him. When plotting His death; Caiaphas (the acting high priest that year) said, “...it is expedient for us that one man should die for the people, and not that the whole nation should perish.” John 11:50 Now he didn’t mean that in any redemptive way but what he was saying was a profound reality. While He hung on the cross people were mocking Him shouting, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save.” Matthew 27:42 Again that wasn’t said from a noble perspective, yet the truth remains that had Jesus saved Himself He could’ve never saved others (namely you and me). Here we’re reading of Jesus, “He receives sinners”. They meant it with contempt but what an incredible compliment; Jesus Christ receives sinners...that’s what He does, and I’m so glad. It’s because of that truth that He received me, and He received you, and if you don’t know Him He wants to receive you too.

You guys, these guys were scholars of the word, brilliant theologians, but they’d completely missed the heart of God. Listen, it’s not intellect that will make you more spiritual. (Though a high IQ isn’t a bad thing) Intimacy should be our goal, not intellect.

You can study the *word* of God and completely miss the *heart* of God. It happens all the time. But you don't have to go too far into the scriptures to discover that seeking after sinners is what God does. When you get to Genesis Ch 3 Vs 7 you read of the immediate consequence of sin in Adam and Eve's life. It says, "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings." Genesis 3:7 That's Vs 7. Guess what we find in Vs 8-9? "*And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?'*"² No sooner than they sinned, God began to seek them out that there might be restoration and reconciliation between them. That's what God does. 1 Timothy 1:15 "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners,*"

It's weird, but it's not uncommon; throughout history those who are "religious" have been tempted to look down on and despise the ones who need their help the most... "But we're to live sanctified/separated lives!" That's right, but what does that mean? Does that mean you don't have any contact with people who are in the world? How then will they be saved? Aren't you glad that someone didn't take that approach with you? Someone shared the gospel with me, because of which I will be eternally grateful. Separate from sin doesn't necessarily mean separate from sinners...

When Paul was writing to the Corinthians he said, "*I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner— not even to eat with such a person.*" 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 So don't avoid contact unbelievers for fear that their sin might rub off on you. Share *with them* show *to them* Christ.

² *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Ge 3:8-9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Now; there's a whole lot of systematic theology when it comes to who seeks for who as it pertains to people's salvation. Does God seek us, or do we seek God? The fact of the matter is that the bible answers that questions with a definitive, "Yes". Both Divine Initiative and human responsibility are clearly displayed throughout your bible.

In the 1st 2 facets of this parable the emphasis lies upon the seeking, sovereign nature of God; in part 3 (which we'll see next time) the emphasis is placed clearly on the responsibility of man to respond to the patient /longsuffering love found in the heart of our heavenly Father. Look at Vs 3

Vs 3-6

So Jesus has no problems with the accusations laid against Him. As a matter of fact He gladly accepts the challenge and justifies His position with unrelenting clarity not only in a manner they'd relate to practically but also in a way that shows the Shepherding compassionate heart of God specifically toward the lost.

1st of all we want to note that this Shepherd knew exactly how many sheep He had and that there was no ratio set up to form an "acceptable loss" kind of quota. If he started with 100 he would end with 100. Most of us would be tempted to think, "Well, 99 out of 100 is a pretty good ratio, that's only a loss of 1%." But God places a value that incomprehensible to you and me upon even one soul. Jesus said, *"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."*³

³ *The New King James Version*. 1982 (Jn 6:39-40). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Jesus will seek out (so as to save) the lost, He will persevere until He finds you and once He does He rescues you from the eminent danger around you; places you on His shoulders and brings you into the fold. This is the love of God, not that we found Him, but that He sought us, He found us, He rescued us. We're all like sheep that had gone astray. The bible is very clear that there are none that are righteous, none who seek after God (Rom 3:10-11). Isaiah 53 tells us, *"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

Now Vs 5-6 begin to note the response of the Shepherd once the sheep has been found. We note He's not angry, He doesn't scold the sheep, but He gladly scoops it up and simply rejoices over the once lost but now found sheep. How many people presume that God is like the giant angry Man in the sky just waiting to punish them for their sin...That's not the heart of God at all, He wants to lay us on His shoulders and rejoice that though we'd strayed, now we're where we need to be; under His care, in His fold, in His arms.

In Vs 6 we see that it's far from an event of condemnation, it's joyous occasion for celebration! So much so that he calls his friends and neighbors together saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!" Here's the idea; the *friends* of God will rejoice along *with* God when sinners repent; if you're not rejoicing over the salvation of the lost (as was the case with the scribes and Pharisees) than you perhaps you need to make sure that you're His friend...

Vs7

So it would seem that somehow and in some way when even one person repents and comes to Christ that information is broadcast "Heaven Wide" (if you will) and it creates a party kind of atmosphere. It's big news, so imagine the scene when a few are saved, or a dozen, or a few thousand! This is the attitude and affection of Christ toward repentant sinners.

Vs8-9

This is simply another angle on the same principle. In that day when a woman would get married she'd have these 10 coins (more than likely a dowry) that she would wear either as a necklace or a headband and they served basically like a wedding ring.

So imagine losing a diamond out of your wedding ring (gals). That's the similar thing here; and back then light in house was scarce at best (not having glass) and a small coin could easily fall in the crevasses of the stone floor in the midst of pottery or any # of things. You can imagine how relieved she'd be to find it. God wants us to know how desperately He longs for us to be restored to Him. Jesus associates with sinners because He's searching for those things of His which are lost and needs to be put back in its proper place (reconciled to God).

Think about the all out panic that can ensue when you lose your wallet; that which contains your identity, your SS#, your credit cards, perhaps a bit of money. It's an all out search until it's found. If it takes you a few days you're really bummed because you're worried about what might be happening. When you find it there's a huge sigh of relief and a rejoicing in your heart! Now that's over a few bucks, perhaps access to a few thousand dollars via your credit cards, yet you rejoice when it's back in it's proper place in your personal care.

Now Jesus said what would it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose His own soul (Matt 16:26). What does that tell me, what does that mean to you? It means as far as God is concerned 1 soul is worth more than all the riches of the world. Now if you rejoice when you recover the few bucks you've lost, how much more will God rejoice when He "recovers" that which is of infinite value over above all the riches of this world?

Vs10

I want you to see something here. How many times guys like me misquote this when we say, "The angels of heave rejoice over 1 sinner who repents." Now I'm sure they do, they enter into that joy, but that's not what this says. It's not joy *on the part* of the angels; it's joy *in the presence* of the angels...

God is the One who “joys” over the repentant soul, it’s *His property* that’s been restored, reconciled and put its proper place. It’s not too often that we think of God as “rejoicing” but yet we read right here that that’s *exactly* what He does!

Listen to this, Isaiah 62:5 “...as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you.” Here’s one more, Zephaniah 3:17 “*The LORD your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.*”

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day believed that God rejoiced when sinners were wiped out, and I pray that we don’t give that impression in our zeal to speak against sin because the truth is that God rejoices *not* when sinners are wiped out but rather when they’re *washed clean*.

God’s love sent Jesus *to us*, it seeks out *after us* and rejoices when it *finds us* and reconciles us to Him by grace through faith in Jesus Christ

Prayer Points:

God Your love is overwhelming; it goes beyond our ability to comprehend. We know who we are, we know where we’ve been, the things we’ve done, how we’ve strayed in our hearts and in our lives. Yet You love us and gave Yourself for us in the Person of Jesus Christ You sought us, searched for us and found us; you placed us lovingly on Your shoulders and placed us in the fold and we give You praise. Give us Your heart toward those around us in need of You, help us to avail ourselves in that sense of Spiritual search and rescue, use us to reach others.

If you’ve not responded to the love of God than let me implore you today to do just that. Don’t put it off another day, if God is speaking to Your heart, He’s been seeking you and you know that today you’ve been found by Him don’t resist Him, don’t do as Adam or Eve and seek to hide from Him. Just come before Him just as you are, Jesus will receive you and He will rejoice over you, just believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.