

Message #74

Luke 15:1-10

One of the great names of Christianity from the mid to late 1800's was D. L. Moody. It is estimated that he was used by God to reach "millions of people" for Jesus Christ. There is one estimate that says he reached 100 million people.

D. L. Moody was not a polished preacher. His vocabulary and theology many times left something to be desired and as a result, not all people liked him. He would reach out to sinners anytime and anywhere. He would go to the streets and into a bar. He would witness to drunks, prostitutes and derelicts. As a result, he was criticized as being too worldly.

In one of his more famous stories, he was being criticized for his methods of reaching people. Someone actually said to him, "we don't like your methods." D. L. Moody responded by saying, "I don't like them too much myself. What method do you use?" When his critic could not answer him because he didn't have any method, Moody replied, "Well, I think I like the way I do it better than the way you don't."

Dr. Leighton Ford, an old Presbyterian minister, said in his book *The Christian Persuaders*, "If Jesus came back today and mingled with gamblers, the skid row crowd and the cocktail set, a lot of shocked Christians would throw up their hands and say he was too worldly."

When Jesus Christ was here on earth, he let all kinds of sinners get near Him. He let tax collectors, prostitutes, lepers get near Him and even touch Him. He mixed with what the religious group said were the "riff-raff" of society. Jesus Christ was not only a "friend of sinners," He was the "Savior of sinners."

Christ was no extreme isolationist or separationist. He reached out to sinners and that made those Pharisees mad. That point becomes very clear when you examine Luke 15. What Dr. Luke says is this:

A CHRIST-LIKE MINISTRY TOWARD SINNERS THAT BRINGS JOY TO GOD IS IN TOTAL CONTRAST TO A PHARISAICAL MINDSET THAT BRINGS JOY TO THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS HYPOCRITE.

If we have a true Christ-like ministry to broken down sinners, we can expect criticism from religious hypocrites. We may discover not only are we criticized, but hated. This animosity will not so much come from the lost heathen world; it will come from the proud, arrogant, self-righteous, Pharisaical hypocrites. That is what happened to Jesus Christ, Himself.

In these opening ten verses of chapter 15, there are three distinct contrasts brought out between the thinking of Jesus Christ and the thinking of a Pharisee:

CONTRAST #1 – There is a major contrast between Christ’s concern for the sinner and the Pharisees contempt for the sinner. **15:1-2**

Verses 1-2 really set the stage for the rest of the chapter. **If you miss these first two verses, you miss the whole meaning of chapter 15.**

This chapter is designed by Luke to show a contrast between the way Christ relates to sinners and the way religious Pharisees relate to sinners. It shows the antithetical contrast between true Christlikeness and Phariseeism. This contrast can basically be understood in that **Jesus Christ welcomes sinners and Pharisees hate sinners.**

The first word of **verse 1**, “now” connects us to the preceding context in which Christ had challenged His disciples to give their total allegiance to Him. They must be willing to make Him the first love of life (14:25); they must be willing to bear their own cross (14:26) and they must be willing to count the cost so they don’t end up a disgrace (14:28-33).

Now carefully notice from **verse 1** who it was who was being drawn to Christ. It was not the religious, self-righteous Pharisee. It was the tax collectors and sinners. The imperfect tense of the verb “were coming” and the present tense of the participle “coming near” and the present tense of the infinitive “to listen” all indicate this action was the continual, habitual action. In other words, it was the tax collectors and sinners who were continually coming to Jesus Christ because He offered them complete forgiveness of sins and hope.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were both detestable in the sight of the Pharisees. Both nouns have articles “the tax collectors” and “the sinners” so we may assume these Pharisees knew them specifically. Tax collectors were considered by Pharisees to be on the same par level as prostitutes (Matt. 21:31-32).

A tax collector worked for Rome and collected money from the Jews. Pharisees knew this money could have gone to them so as a result, those tax collectors were hated. Fact is, tax collectors were known for their thievery and fraud and many did become rich by taking more money than Rome required (Luke 19:8).

Now the sinners were those who did miss the mark of the righteousness of God, as we all have. But they did not measure up to the Pharisaical rules and codes. To the Pharisee any who did hit their self-righteous standard were sinners. If someone was poor or crippled or blind or lame, they were considered to be filthy sinners who were being punished for their sin.

Let me pause here a moment and ask, “Are any sinners ever drawn to us? Are those who have been broken and bruised by sin ever drawn to us?” Or have we put up Pharisaical barriers because they don’t fit our codes?

Sinners were drawn to Jesus Christ. Sinners had been written off by the rest of the religious crowd because they had made a mess of their own lives were drawn to Him. In fact, **verse 2** says not only where they drawn to Christ, but He “receives them.”

There was a minister in Dallas who was once quizzed about a man who was seen leaving the parsonage with a cigar in his hand. The Pastor said next time you see him, he may be leaving with a beer in his hand because he is always welcome to stop by and I will always try to point him to Jesus Christ.

CONTRAST #2 – The contrast between Christ’s concern for souls and the Pharisees concern for sheep. **15:3-7**

Verse 3 informs us that Christ decided to give them a parable, which is an earthly story designed to illustrate a heavenly truth. He decides to use a shepherd and sheep parable.

The shepherd imagery is certainly something to which these Pharisees could relate:

- 1) Because many people owned sheep (Pharisees did not appreciate shepherds)
- 2) Because many sheep were used in Temple sacrifices (Pharisees participated)
- 3) Because Pharisees considered themselves to be shepherds over Israel (Ez. 34; Zech. 11).

Verses 4-6 explain how any man would react if he lost one of his sheep. In this particular story, the shepherd had 100 sheep and as he was counting them, he noticed that one was missing. He lost one of them in the “open pasture” which literally means it was in a wilderness area.

The moment the shepherd realized he was missing a sheep, he immediately went out to look for it and when he found it, he put it on his shoulders and took it home. He was rejoicing and his friends were rejoicing, and his neighbors were rejoicing over the fact that they found that one sheep.

Pharisees could relate to a story like that. It is a happy story with a happy ending. But Pharisees cannot relate to lost souls.

In **verse 7**, Christ makes the application that in heaven, when one repentant sinner is found, there is greater joy than for the 99 Pharisees who think they need no repentance. In other words, the 99 represent those who think they are safe in their self-righteous religion. The one represents the sinner who realizes he is lost and in need of a Savior. Heaven finds no joy in the self-righteous religious crowd; but finds great joy in the one repentant sinner.

The 99, who thought they were right with God based on their own self-righteousness, brought no joy to God. It was the one repentant sinner that brought heaven its joy. What is so amazing about the parable is that it was the straying away from the self-righteous religion that led to the realization that one was lost.

Until one is willing to admit he has wandered away from God, he is in no position to be saved (Is. 53:6; I Pet. 2:25). All we like sheep have gone astray and until we admit this, we are lost. In the Jewish religious world, 1 out of 100 realized this.

The theology of this parable in saving this sheep is amazing:

- 1) The shepherd went looking for the lost sheep; not the lost sheep looking for the shepherd (Luke 19:10).
- 2) The shepherd found the lost sheep; the lost sheep did not find the shepherd (Luke 15:5a).
- 3) The shepherd carries the saved sheep; not the saved sheep carrying the shepherd (Luke 15:5b).

Those of you who have believed in Jesus Christ have been tracked down by the Great Shepherd. He came looking for you when you were in a wilderness of sin and rebellion. He found you in your sin and He grabbed hold of you and saved you and He is carrying you all the way to heaven.

Do you see what brings God great joy? When His Son tracks down a sinner and carries him home. That brings great joy to God, not Pharisaical, self-righteous hypocrisy.

CONTRAST #3 – The contrast between Christ’s concern for souls and the Pharisees concern for silver. **15:8-10**

Now Christ tells another parable designed to show how valuable God views those He finds and saves. Finding money was rated very high on the priority list of the Pharisees. The Pharisee was dollar oriented and thought nothing of robbing widows (Matt. 23:14).

Jesus uses an illustration of a woman who lost one piece of silver.

- 1) She had 10 coins and lost 1. It may have been part of her dowry or her savings. She lost 10%.
Naturally the 10% number would mean something to the Pharisees.
- 2) She wanted to find the lost coin.
- 3) She lit a lamp and began her search.
- 4) She carefully searched her entire house and she found it.

When she did, she called her friends and neighbors and they all rejoiced because she found her money. These Pharisees could relate to a story like this.

But then Jesus states in **verse 10**, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Now here is the point of all of this. Jesus Christ spent much of His time with sinners on earth because He knew that brought great joy to His Father and to the angels in heaven. When He was finding these lost people and bringing them into a right relationship with God, all heaven lit up.

Heaven is never lit up by self-righteous, religious Pharisees and hypocrites. Heaven finds its greatest joy when Jesus tracks down a sinner.

A friend of mine drew a moose tag for Idaho and wanted to hunt a canyon, I knew like the back of my hand. When we lived in Idaho, I spent more time in that canyon than any other in the state. He asked me where I thought they could find a moose and I told him two or three key spots. Sure enough, in one of the spots they harvested a big moose.

I have to say, I miss the west. I found great joy living there. There are things I loved about the west.

- 1) I loved the mountains - The Tetons and the Sawtooths.
- 2) I loved hunting and harvesting Elk.
- 3) I loved to go into the mountains and see the deer and the bear and the lions.
- 4) I loved to go into the mountains and camp.
- 5) I loved my horses and loved to ride them deep into those Rocky Mountains.
- 6) I loved to hike up and down mountains and go to places most will never go.

But of all the things that brought me joy in the west, the greatest were the people we saw come to Christ.

One day there was a knock at my door and a lovely woman said I hear you are someone who will tell me the truth. You are my last hope and if you can't help me, I will kill myself. I said what is the problem and she proceeded to tell me a sordid story of a life filled with many wrong choices. When she got done, I said well I have good news for you; you can be forgiven of it all right here and right now by inviting Jesus Christ into your life. She said I want to do that and she did. She moved to California and there she died. When I was at my office packing my books for the move here, there was a knock at my door and there was a woman, I had never seen. She said Pastor Thompson, you do not know me but you did know my sister and I want you to know she spent her final days on earth serving the Lord because you pointed her to Jesus Christ. She took my hand and said, "Thank you."

Now that story is one of the greatest joys of my life. Why? Because what I had the privilege of seeing was God tracking down a broken sheep. He tracked her down and found her and He carried her all the way home to heaven.