

The God Who Rejoices!

Call to Worship: Zephaniah 3:14-20

1st Scripture: Luke 15:1-10

2nd Scripture: Luke 15:11-32

Hymn #3 (Supp)- *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*

Hymn #1- *All People that on Earth do Dwell*

Hymn #547- *My Jesus I Love Thee*

Doxology- *I Love You, Lord*

Introduction:

Last Sunday evening, we sang the same doxology, which we had just sung this morning, as well. And that was no coincidence. As I sang that short chorus, last Sunday, I was struck by the simple words of that hymn, which provoked a meditation in my heart, leading me to digress from "The Life of David," for one week, so as, to share with you the substance of this meditation, both as a comfort for your soul (if you are in Christ), and as a compelling motivation for our God-directed actions, in the times ahead.

Such simple words, but, if sung from the heart, they are wings for the soul, which carry our own emotions into the very throne room of God, to revel with exultation, in His incomprehensible goodness! "I love You, Lord and I lift my voice, to worship You, Oh, my soul, rejoice! Take joy my King, in what You hear. Let it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear."

You see, the presumption of these words, is that God is a God, who takes joy in our love and worship toward Him. "Take joy my King..." In other words, He is not distant or cold, or stoic. God actually rejoices in us, and in all that He accomplishes in, by and through us? And He relates to us, not only as a King and as a Creator, but also as a Father... "Abba, Father?"

And so, needless to say, we sang that same chorus again, this morning, as a preface to what we will consider in our main text, here in Luke's Gospel. Now, let me also say, that I am not going to do a full exposition of chapter 15. That would take much more time. But, I do want to draw us in, to consider one glorious facet of the diamond, which can be found here, showing very clearly, that our infinite, eternal, and incomprehensible God, is a God who actually rejoices! And, while we cannot pretend to understand the full weight of this reality (God is not like us, in our often shallow, corrupt and even finite emotions), there is enough to blow us away, and to fill our hearts with genuine love and adoration, for the One, who is self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and without beginning or end.

I. Every Parable has a Context

Let me begin then, by stating a critical fact, which always must be kept in mind, when studying the Scriptures; in fact, a most critical fact to lay hold of, anytime we seek to discover the meaning of any particular text of Scripture. And that fact is that, "Context is critical for understanding the meaning of any text." And brethren, that is also the case for parables. Parables are not mere, mysterious stories, where we have to discover some deep and hidden meaning behind all of the symbols. No, most parables have a single meaning, and all parables, have a context, which provides all of the necessary tools for opening up, and understanding each parable. That does not mean that they are all equally easy to understand. Sometimes, cultural information must be grasped from that time, so that we can carry the meaning over to our own time... etc, but, all in all, the context is the key, to unlocking and grasping the main point of any parable. That being established, let us identify the critical context of the three parables, spoken by our Lord, here in Luke 15. And that context can be found, where most parabolic contexts can be found, usually within the historical events (and conversations) recorded, before the parables are actually spoken. In the case of these parables, the context can be located in verses 1-3.

"Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him (Jesus) to hear Him. And the Pharisees and Scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.' So He spoke this parable to them saying... "

Following these words, our Lord tells the first two parables, and then the third parable is prefaced with the words, "Then He said.." (vs. 11). And so, all three parables find their meaning, solely within the context, established here in verses 1-3. Now, before we consider a brief summary of these parables, let me open up the context a bit more.

What is going on here? We are told that the sinners and the tax collectors; that is, the law breakers and those who were evidently wicked in the sight of man and God, flocked to Jesus, seeing Him as a means of hope, forgiveness and salvation for them. And the Pharisees and the Scribes, then complained that Jesus did not turn these sinners away; that is to say, the religious leaders, and the self-righteous, who had distanced themselves from sinners and lawbreakers, began to complain about the fact that Jesus was actually receiving and welcoming sinners to

Himself. He was eating and fellowshiping with them, rather than turning them away, and condemning them. And so, if this Jesus were truly a Man of God, He would not associate with such lawbreakers. You see, the religious leaders of our Lord's time, had barred sinners from any means of obtaining forgiveness and reconciliation with God. All they saw was the Law; the Law, which they themselves had failed to keep (at least the spirit of it), leading them to discount any possibility of mercy and grace. Jesus contradicted them, in that He received such sinners, and they complained about it.

Jesus's response to these complaints is given in the parables, which follow. In your own mind, you might preface each parable with the words, "Here is why I receive sinners and traitorous thieves (tax collectors), and here is why as well, and furthermore, here." Having this context in mind, let us now consider a brief summary of the three parables.

II. A Summary of the Three Parables

1) The Lost Sheep: In the first parable, our Lord illustrates His response by bringing His audience to consider the example of a man, who has lost one of his sheep. Every individual sheep is so valuable to the man, that he would even leave the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness, and go after the one that is lost, without returning, until he found that one sheep. It is that valuable to him. And furthermore, when he finds the one sheep, he carries it on his shoulders, and rejoices the whole way back. And then, when he gets home, he is so excited about having found the one sheep, that he calls his friends and his neighbors together; he invites them over to celebrate with him, because he is so excited about having found the one sheep, which was once lost. You don't call your friends and neighbors together, to share in your joy, and to celebrate having found something, which is of little value to you.

2) The Lost Coin: In the second parable, Jesus illustrates the same point, but this time, with the example of a woman, who has lost a valuable silver coin; apparently, one out of a set of ten. And she searches everywhere; every nook and cranny of the house, until she finds it. Again, it is that important to her. The extent of her searching, like, in the parable of the lost sheep, is emphasized to prove value, worth and importance. Finally, she also finds the coin, and calls her

neighbors and friends together, asking them to rejoice with her. The coin was just that precious to her, leading her to bring others to share in her joy, upon finding it!

3) The Lost Son: Finally, most at home, with what our Lord was doing in receiving sinners, He tells the last parable, which speaks of the lost son. In this case, the spiritual emphasis is greatly highlighted. In this parable, a man has two sons, and the younger of these two sons, asks his father to give him, his share of the inheritance, before his father passes away. And then, this same son, immediately leaves home (traveling to a distant land), and blows his entire share of the inheritance (his entire share of his father's well earned money) on prodigal living; gambling, prostitutes and all kinds of careless, wasteful spending.

Eventually, a famine comes, and the young man has nothing. He is starving and desperate, and so, he basically sells himself into slavery, to a citizen of that foreign country, where he winds up working out in the field, feeding swine/pigs. So desperate was he, that he even began to covet the food, belonging to the pigs, but no one gave him anything.

Alas, in this position of utter desperation, the young son, came to his senses, and realized that even his father's servants had enough and more, to live on. And so, he decides to go back to his father, to confess his sin, and to seek to obtain the position of a servant, recognizing that he does not deserve to be treated as a son, anymore. But, while he is on his way back, his father notices him coming, from afar, and he runs out to his son, and firmly embraces him and kisses him. And when the son makes his confession and seeks the position of a hired servant, his father would have none of it. Instead, his father, rather decks him with the best robe, puts a valuable ring on his hand, and sandals on his feet. And then, he charges his servants to bring out the fatted calf, and to kill it, so that they might eat and joyfully celebrate the return of his son.

But, the older brother was not too happy about this. And so, when he expresses his grief to his father, questioning his father's kindness for receiving his wayward son back (who blew his half of the inheritance on wasteful and sinful living), the father responds by saying that it is good and right to rejoice over the homecoming of his younger brother, because he was once lost, but was now found, and he was once dead, but now he was alive. The man had his son back, and in spite of all that his son had done wrong, he was overwhelmed with joy, in seeing his son delivered from the weight of his sin, being rightly restored to a good and sound mind.

III. Brining the Context and the Parabolic Messages Together

Having considered the context, brethren, and having considered a general summary of the three parables, let us now bring the context and the meaning of the parables together.

What is the main point that Jesus is trying to get across, to those who were complaining about his "receiving/welcoming and eating with sinners?" Well brethren, in answering this question, we will also find three relevant and critical applications, supporting the main theme of this sermon.

1) Firstly, the Pharisees and the Scribes had lost the very basic understanding of the value of the human soul. That is why our Lord says, "Look, which of you, if you lost a sheep, or what woman, if she lost a silver coin, wouldn't go out of their way, to seek and find that lost item. Indeed, not only would you search for it, but upon finding it, you would call everyone to come and share in your joy of finding it. And all the more, suppose a father's son had gone deeply astray, but then, having recognized his wrong, returned to his father, seeking mercy, what father would turn his face away from his desperate son?

When you lose what is yours, especially something of value, you search for it, and are thrilled and overjoyed when you find it. How much more then, the value of lost souls, which all belong to God? This sinner, and this tax collector, indeed, both, having done wicked things, have come to acknowledge and confess their wrongs, and now they are pleading for mercy and grace from the One, who fashioned them in His very image, for His glory. "Should they not be received, and welcomed; should I not eat with them, pardon them, and receive them back, which belong to Me? And, are they not far more valuable and precious then all of the sheep and silver coins, found in the entire world?"

And brethren, lest we be too harsh toward the religious leaders here, from our standpoint, let us identify with them, and see, in our sin nature, a sad, lack of concern for lost, never dying souls, who are presently at enmity with their Creator. Does it trouble us at all, that so many, precious souls; that souls beyond number, which pass us by in the malls, which work in the next cubicle to us, which live and exist across the street and alongside of us, separated only by a bit of plaster, wood and brick... does it trouble us that so many, never dying souls, will one day, indeed,

very soon perish in their sins, if they are found outside of Jesus Christ? That we... that I, could recognize the solution to the whole of the problem; the cure to the cancer; the food for the famine, and have no compassionate sense of urgency, directed to the perishing and the ignorant, who are still trapped in the very sins, which once kept me from grace; that I have the message that saves and cures... that the way of salvation is fixed to a message, which I know, all too well, while others have no hand or hope set upon the Christ, who saves, ought to shake me, at the core of my very soul! The difference between eternal hell and eternal bliss is carried in our bosoms; we are the light of the world, and there are so, so many, who yet, walk in darkness! Let the value of the human soul, compel us all to be evangelists, brethren! Let it compel us to toss out an abundance of Gospel keys, to those who are yet, locked in the depravity of their sin, and under the sway of the devil. Forever is a long time, a very, very, long time; an unending time, and it carries along with it, precious, never dying souls, either in a state of torment and agony, or in a state of joy, love and bliss!

2) These parables help open up, something precious and incomprehensible about the majestic heart of God! Our God is a God, who rejoices, brethren! And He rejoices over lost souls, that have come to find redemption and restoration, in His Son.

That is one of the main points here, is it not? Jesus is saying, "You are complaining about My receiving repentant sinners, and eating with them! This is the very joy of heaven! I make no apology for my actions, indeed, I further exalt them.

And brethren, here is the profound thing about this point. In all of the parables, there is a great emphasis on the joy that God Himself experiences over us, redeemed sinners! In fact, in the first two examples, Jesus moves from parable, into reality, to confirm that what He is saying is not merely symbolic! It is a reality. Notice:

A) In the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus steps out of the parable and into reality in the summary statement, given in verse 7, "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." There is great joy in heaven over even one sinner, who repents! And the self-righteous; those, who see themselves as needing no repentance, provoke no such joy, because they are deceived. But, who is the main subject, who is expressing and experiencing this joy? The "likewise" statement tells

us! Just as the man who lost his sheep, gathers his friends and neighbors together and invites them to rejoice with him, Christ and the Father and the Holy Spirit; God, who is most definitely the real life equivalent of the man; who is the One who has suffered the loss of His image bearers; He rejoices and calls all who are in heaven (angelic beings and hosts alike) to rejoice with Him. To miss *God* rejoicing here, indeed, God, at the center of the joy being experienced and expressed, is to miss the whole point of the parable, and its context, where Jesus is the One being rebuked for welcoming and eating with sinners!

B) In the parable of the lost coin, we find the same connection. Look again, at verse 10, where Jesus breaks away from parable, moving into the reality, expressed by the parable.

"Likewise (in the same way), I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Now brethren, how many of us have been guilty of emphasizing the *angels*, as being the ones who are rejoicing here? Indeed, the angels are rejoicing, even as the friends and neighbors rejoice with the woman in the parable. But, there is joy, *in the presence of* the angels! Who is rejoicing, first and primarily! Who does the woman represent in the parable! It is God, who is highlighted as rejoicing here! Again, the context and the parables themselves confirm this, do they not!? Who has suffered the loss? Who has received back what was lost? Not the angels or the heavenly beings, but God; the very Christ, who is, in this context, receiving and eating with sinners!

C) And while the parable of the lost son, does not break into a "likewise" statement, the point is greatly magnified there, as well, isn't it! The father sees the broken son from afar, and he runs out to the son, and falls on his neck (to embrace him), and decks him with royalty and organizes a celebratory feast for him!

What am I getting at, here, brethren? Do you see a bit of the heart of God here? Can we relate God directly to the emotions of men, and draw all kinds of connecting lines? Of course not! We are finite and we are fallen! We lack self-control and perfection and purity! But, nonetheless, we serve a God who rejoices; a God, who in some way; in some perfect, profound and most preferred way, has divine emotion! What practical relevance does that have, brethren? Does it not, all the more, shine forth the incomprehensible glory of His love and mercy and

grace! We don't have a stoic God, who simply goes through the motions and presses through the checklist of His preferences... etc! No, grace itself, mercy itself, love itself, all confirm that within the divine essence, is the most profound, glorious, and majestic of emotions! And this compels us to fall down in awe and love and amazement and worship! God rejoices over you, brethren! Yes, He ordained your salvation before time! Yes, He planned, knew and caused your repentance, but all of that (and more, being the case), when your eyes were opened for the first time (indeed, by Him), and when you flew to Christ for grace, and found reconciliation with God through Christ, God rejoiced! And He still rejoices over you! And you can take that to the bank! Let that resonate in your soul for a little while; let that sit in the crockpot for awhile! And see where that carries your obedience, and faithfulness and love! God is our God and Creator; He is our King and our Ruler, but He is also our loving, compassionate Father!

3) Lastly, what then was the primary call to action, given to the religious leaders here, by Jesus, in this response? It is the same call given to the older brother, by the father, in the last parable. "What's lost is found! What was dead is now made alive! God is rejoicing! All of heaven is rejoicing! Elder son, shouldn't you be rejoicing?" The welcoming and receiving of sinners into the Kingdom and family of God, is a thing to be greatly rejoiced over, by all of God's children!

And brethren, that leaves us with a last and final charge. Yes, this life is very hard. Yes, we must, through many trials, enter the Kingdom of heaven. The gate is narrow, the road is difficult. Suffering is part and parcel, for the whole course. But, but, lost, dead sinners, are being found, redeemed and given new life in Christ! God is saving sinners, brethren! Don't lose sight of that, in the midst of your sanctifying hardships! It is just too easy for us, who have been in Christ for any number of years, to grow aloof and dull, to the great work that God is doing in the hearts of dead sinners! If even one sinner is saved, all of heaven rejoices, with God at the center! Should we do anything less? God give us the grace to step back from the individual trees of our temporal suffering, and to see the forest, indeed, the harvest, of what God is doing, in bringing precious souls into His glorious Kingdom, forever! Brands, plucked from the fires of hell, as it were, just like us... cleaned off, and made new and useful in Christ! Let us gather with

the friends and neighbors of heaven; indeed, let us be elated with joy, as we continue to see sinners reconciled to the same God, whom we all call Father!

AMEN!!!

The Lord's Supper!