

REPENTANCE AND REJOICING IN THE KINGDOM

LUKE 15:1-10

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Why does Jesus associate with and eat with tax collectors and sinners? Doesn't he know that they are unfaithful to God and unrighteous before him and unworthy of his grace? Yes! But Jesus knows that Father God and His Heavenly Court rejoices over one sinner who repents!

Although man does not seek after God (Rom. 3:9-23), God nevertheless, relentlessly and lovingly seeks and pursues his people, rejoicing when they repent of their sins and turn to Christ by faith! Jesus tells two parables in our text this morning that reveals the character of God toward all sinners who repent and find salvation and hope in Jesus Christ!

Concerning the prior context of Dr. Luke's gospel and our sermons that have preceded chapter 15, we should notice that all of chapter 15 is in response to the question of 15:2 about why Jesus is welcoming sinners and eating with them. The Pharisees and the Scribes cannot fathom why Jesus would partake of a meal with tax collectors and sinners.

If you recall from chapter 14, Jesus tells the crowds that while many Israelites who have been invited to sup with him at the wedding banquet were making excuses as to why they could not come, yet many from the margins of society, such as the poor, crippled, the lame, and the blind are eagerly responding to his invitation (14:13; cf. 14:21; 16:20). Part of the celebration and feast that Jesus had spoken of in chapter 14 is partially being realized in that there is great celebration at the meal as sinners from the margins of society draw near to Jesus and find their hope of salvation.

At the end of chapter 14 we learned of Jesus' expectations of those who would be his disciples (14:25-35). As Jesus has told clearly the expectations of what it means to be a disciple, now he tells those who have ears to hear (14:35b) what it means to be forgiven and restored to God through faith and repentance.

We also should understand this portion of Scripture today in light of the larger context of chapter 15. The first two parables belong with the third parable on the Prodigal Son or the Prodigal God! We will look at these portions of scripture separately in two sermons, today consider the first two parables and next week (D.V.) considering the third parable that Jesus teaches.

What we learn in the first two parables primarily is that from God's heavenly and divine perspective the repentance and restoration of sinners to God is cause for great rejoicing and celebration!

ESV Luke 15:1-10: Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Luke 19:10 summarizes this passage and reveals the heart of God in Jesus Christ:

ESV Luke 19:10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

I. Tax Collectors and Sinners Drawing Near to Jesus (v. 1)

This is a beautiful picture of our Savior's graciousness and how he reveals God's concerns for the lost. As Professor Green wrote: "In welcoming such persons to the table Jesus is only giving expression to the expansive grace of God" (*Luke*, NICNT, pg. 569).

- a. **Who were the "tax collectors and sinners"?** Simply put: They are "the lost". That is, they are those who have no hope of salvation in their own righteousness and know it full well! In the famous evangelistic set up question: "What would you say if you died tonight and God asked why he should allow you to enter into heaven?" The tax collectors and sinners would have to say "He wouldn't let us in"!

Tax Collectors

Tax collectors (sometimes translated "publicans") were some of the lowest people socially on the list of the *Who's Who of Important People* in ancient Israel. They served Rome in taking taxes from the people of Israel and were considered unfaithful traitors by many of their own people.

Tax collectors were some of the most despised people in the ancient world and rabbis spoke of them along with "robbers" and "swindlers" Roman writers joined them with "brothel-keepers" You could say that tax collectors were in many ways like modern mobsters with regard to their accumulating wealth and practicing all forms of malice.

Anyone who had associations with tax collectors was usually for ill-gotten and sordid financial gain, and those who associated with them would be

thought disloyal to Judaism because of their association with Rome. You should remember that in Israel's thinking, Rome was taxing *their people* and *their land* and to have one of their own doing the taxing and getting rich doing it was a filthy way to earn one's living!

It should be noted that the tax collectors' alms were no good in the synagogue or temple. Their testimony was not allowed in the ancient courts of justice. The tax collectors would have been the last kind of people any exalted and important Pharisee and/or Scribe would have "hung out" with. Jesus uses tax collectors' selfish notoriety in describing and contrasting what self-less divine love looks like:

ESV Matthew 5:46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

Although the Pharisees would receive repentant sinners who had already turned from their sins, Jesus would reveal that the heart of ***God loves to go after diligently those who are despised and rejected who have yet to repent and believe.*** These tax collectors and sinners were received by Jesus and ate with him (v. 2b). Jesus took a real interest in them in contrast to the Pharisees and the Scribes.

The Pharisees were concerned that their "holiness" and "righteousness" might be contaminated or polluted by the tax collectors and sinners, while Jesus revealed that true holiness and righteousness will not become contaminated if it is real, rather ***it can influence others toward repentance.***

Jesus in no way endorsed their behavior, lifestyle, or sins, but he did seek these sinful people out so that they too could hear the good news of the Gospel of the Kingdom found in Him.

As Jesus said earlier in Luke 5:

*ESV Luke 5:30-32: And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"³¹ And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick."³² **I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.**"*

"Sinners"

Dr. Luke refers to "sinners" ten times in his gospel which is more times than any other gospel writer. The sinners were like those today who we can identify easily as NOT being righteous "church-going" folk.

They are not in any way identified with those in the covenant. They live and practice their sinfulness for all to see and most know of their sinful lives and behavior. Sinners were perceived by many in Israel as forfeiting their

relationship to God because of a lifestyle unfaithful to God's law (Bock, pg. 1298).

In the ancient world "sinners" were considered in Rabbinic interpretation and writings as "debtors" or "sinners" who were to be punished and destroyed by Messiah when he comes and the world would be cleaned from their sinful taint and influence (see *Targum Isaiah* 11:4). The term "sinner" was also used with "Gentile" as in "Gentile sinner" emphasizing that they were not part of the covenant visible people of God.

b. Why were they drawing near to Jesus to hear him? (v. 1)

We should rejoice that these deplorable people in the eyes of many in Israel were seeking Jesus! Not only were they drawing near to him, the text tell us that *they were drawing near to hear him*.

In other words, they drew near to him to sit at his feet as disciples of the Kingdom (they are willing to renounce all to follow Jesus, cf. Luke 14:25-35). In light of our context of Luke 14:35b, it is apparent that they have indeed ears to hear what it means to count the cost of being Jesus' disciple. As we heard Jesus say in our last sermon (v. 14:35b): "***He who has ears to hear, let him hear.***"

These were deplorable and wicked sinners, yet they needed redemption and knew where to find it! We too need the same grace and mercy that Christ shows to these who are humbly hearing His Word.

II. The Pharisees and Scribes' Grumble at a Distance from Jesus (v. 2)

In contrast to the lost hearing Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes are grumbling in complaint. This is not the first recorded incident by Dr. Luke where the Pharisees have blatantly rejected Jesus' teaching and practices- - and grumbled:

^{ESV} Luke 5:29-32: And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. ³⁰ And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" ³¹ And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³² I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

The Greek word used here is $\delta\iota\epsilon\gamma\acute{o}\gamma\gamma\upsilon\zeta\omicron\nu$ [*diagogguzo* {dee-ag-ong-good'-zo}] and is also found in Luke 19:7:

^{ESV} Luke 19:7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

The verb comes first in the sentence to emphasize and stress that the Pharisees and Scribes were characterized by ongoing grumbling (or “murmuring” KJV) as in “Grumbling, the Pharisees and Scribes...” They were grumblers!

The Old Testament background of the response of grumbling by Israel’s teachers should be understood as reflective of sinful Israel who grumbled and complained against God’s representatives, Moses and Aaron (Exodus 15-17; Numbers 14-17; 1 Cor. 10:10).

a. Who were the Pharisees and Scribes?

In contrast to Tax collectors and sinners, the Pharisees and the Scribes held exalted and learned places in Israel’s society. They were the opposite end of the social and religious ladder from “those sinners”. *Pharisees and Scribes held religious and politically envious positions that made them very important in the eyes of the Israelite people.*

However, in the Gospels Pharisees are generally depicted as opponents of Jesus, critical of his behavior, hostile in their questions, malicious in their deliberations. In turn, their piety is attacked as hypocritical, their spiritual leadership is declared bankrupt, and they are charged with leading the nation of Israel to its doom (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, “Pharisees,” pg. 609).

Scribes began as recorders and copyists of official date (2 Kings 12:10) and formed themselves into guilds (1 Chronicles 2:55). They came to hold high political office over time (1 Kings 4:3; 2 Kings 18:18; 25:19; Isa. 22:15) and became the heirs of the priests and Levites as interpreters of the Law (2 Chronicles 34:13; Ezra 7:12) (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, “Scribes”, pg. 732).

The Pharisees called all people to obedience to their *interpretations* of Torah, or God’s Law in order to be faithful and righteous; the Scribes or “Lawyers” were those who interpreted the meaning of God’s Law in many ways that was against what God had intended as his meaning to His people.

You could say that the Pharisaical and Scribal view of “penitent” or one who is repentant means coming to them on their terms to hear their interpretation of the Law that they are to keep.

Ironically, a sinner joining the Pharisees and Scribes as disciples made them more a part of the Kingdom of Israel than the Kingdom of God- -they became worse off than they were before they were “converted” according to our Lord Jesus (That is why Jesus says to the Pharisees that they cross land and see to

seek a convert (or proselyte), but in their discipleship efforts they make him *twice the son of hell* as they are- Matthew 23:15).

In contrast to this, Jesus called sinners to himself to realize their unfaithfulness and unrighteousness and their need for a substitute to keep the law for them. The Pharisees demanded that people merely externally observe their interpretations of God's Law, while Jesus demanded that the people repent of their sins under the Law and find their true hope not in themselves, *but in HIM!*

What is true and saving repentance?

We first should define repentance before we proceed. **What is true repentance? What does repentance look like?** The *Westminster Confession of Faith* is a good place to start with regard to a definition of repentance, the *Larger Catechism* teaches:

WLC 153 What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us by reason of the transgression of the law? A. That we may escape the wrath and curse of God due to us by reason of the transgression of the law, he requireth of us repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,(1) and the diligent use of the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation.(2) (1)Acts 20:21; Matt. 3:7,8; Luke 13:3,5; Acts 16:30,31; John 3:16,18 (2)Prov. 2:1-5; Prov. 8:33-36

WLC 76 What is repentance unto life? A. Repentance unto life is a saving grace,(1) wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit(2) and word of God,(3) whereby out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger,(4) but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins,(5) and upon the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent,(6) he so grieves for(7) and hates his sins,(8) as that he turns from them all to God,(9) purposing and endeavouring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience.(10) (1)2 Tim. 2:25 (2)Zech. 12:10 (3)Acts 11:18,20,21 (4)Ezek. 18:28,30,32; Luke 15:17,18; Hos. 2:6,7 (5)Ezek. 36:31; Isa. 30:22 (6)Joel 2:12,13 (7)Jer. 31:18,19 (8)2 Cor. 7:11 (9)Acts 26:18; Ezek. 14:6; 1 Kings 8:47,48 (10)Ps. 119:6,59,128; Luke 1:6; 2 Kings 23:25

WCF 15.1 Repentance unto life is an evangelical grace.(1) the doctrine whereof is to be preached by every minister of the Gospel, as well as that of faith in Christ.(2) (1)Zech. 12:10; Acts 11:18. (2)Luke 24:47; Mark 1:15; Acts 22:21.

The Pharisees and Scribes had a misunderstanding about the Old Testament's teaching on repentance as well as in their associations with the wicked. In fact in a Rabbinical tract that interpreted Exodus 18:1 (*Amalek*, 3.55-57) it says: "*Let not a man associate with the wicked, even to bring him near to the law*" (Quoted in Bock, pg. 1299). This seems to be the *modus operandi* found in Acts 10 that even Cornelius, the Gentile convert to Christianity knew full well when the Apostle Peter came to preach the gospel to him and seek repentance from sinners as Jesus is doing here:

ESV Acts 10:28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

In other texts the Pharisees and Scribes taught the Jewish people that they were not to eat with the wicked for fear of contracting uncleanness.

Yet Jesus does not share this same mentality (or interpretation) and reveals that Israel's teachers are NOT teachers after God's own heart. Even though they stay away from the wicked, *they have become just as wicked as the "wicked" in their unrighteousness and external formalism before (or in!) the face of God.*

b. Why were they grumbling at a distance from Jesus? (v. 2)

The Pharisees and Scribes would not come near Jesus but rather stayed at a distance criticizing him and grumbling about his Messianic-Mission. They have just as much a need of the forgiveness of their sins as those who Jesus is eating and associating with bad reputations.

Table fellowship was perhaps more important in the ancient world than it is today in expressing one's status in society (even though we usually eat with folks just like us normally). The table in ancient society served as a border or boundary between differing social groups.

Pharisees would never have sat at table with sinners for instance (cf. Acts 10:28; Galatians 2), it would have made them like them by association. From the perspective of the Pharisees and Scribes, Jesus is not following social norms of that polite society- -and this gives them even more reason to turn against him.

c. What is the purpose of this contrast in Dr. Luke's Gospel?

Jesus wants to show us in this passage (as Dr. Luke graphically illustrates this for the former pagan Gentile *Theolophilus* - -and us to see!) that even though the tax collectors and scribes were bad and sinful men in the ancient world, *the more deplorable of the lot was the Pharisees and Scribes; those who would not come to Jesus by faith!*

These teachers of Israel were those who were living as hypocrites rather than those called by God to make His Word known, to instruct God's people, and to lead them in paths of righteousness for His Name's sake!

It's a very sad day when you have a lot of "religious people" who even though they are trying to live good external lives and they're not engaged in outward heinously sinful conduct, but they are just as wicked if not more wicked than those who most consider "terrible sinners" because the "terrible sinners" are finding repentance and restoration to God and a release from their enslaved bondage to sin!

As Jesus says elsewhere about the Pharisees and Scribes: "...For the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. ⁷ You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸ *"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹ in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."* –Matthew 15:6-9

Dr. Luke has compared the tax collectors and Pharisees and scribes prior in his gospel:

^{ESV} Luke 7:29-30: (When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John, ³⁰ but the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.)

If you recall from Luke 7, the tax collectors had understood the repentance that John the Baptist called for in light of the coming of Messiah and were baptized by John. However, the Pharisees and lawyers (or scribe) "rejected the purpose of God for themselves..." (v. 30). Additionally, through Jesus' involvement with sinners, many of the Pharisees and Scribes called him a glutton and a drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners for his association with them:

^{ESV} Matthew 11:19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."

The Pharisees and Scribes are implying that Jesus is like them and that he is disloyal to the Jews! However, Jesus says that these kinds of people will inherit the kingdom *in contrast to the Pharisees and the Scribes:*

^{ESV} Matthew 21:31b Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you.

Jesus says of the scribes specifically that they were cruelly self-centered and selfish in their lifestyle and service in the community:

^{ESV} Luke 20:45-47: And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, ⁴⁶ "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, ⁴⁷ who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

III. Two Parables about God's Love for Repentant Sinners

As we approach these parables, let us be reminded of an important purpose of the parables. A purpose of parables is to reveal the character of God; that is, what he is like. A parable reveals the Kingdom, but it also conceals it from those who do

not have ears to hear and eyes to see given by God alone (cf. Luke 8:1-15; Matthew 13):

To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.' (Luke 8:10).

We must consider all scripture in the greater context and let scripture interpret scripture. If we considered these parables alone, detached from the greater teaching of scripture concerning God's sovereignty, we might be tempted to think that God is too much like us.

What we must understand about God revealed in these parables is simply that he diligently searches and graciously saves His lost people. God is willing to go to great effort by searching diligently and thoroughly for his lost people and rejoice when they repent in light of the Gospel of the Kingdom found in Jesus Christ.

These two parables that Jesus teaches are very similar in form (parallel structure and verbal repetition): 1) Something is lost (sheep or coin); 2) The owner seeks what is lost; 3) What is sought is found; and 4) There is rejoicing.

Professor Green points out that there is an escalation in the three parables from chapter 15 considered together; in the first parable, the shepherd loses one sheep out of one hundred; the woman in the second parable loses one coin out of ten; the father in the third parable loses one son out of two (*Luke*, NICNT, pg. 573).

The first parable primarily reveals God's heart concerning the diligence in how he seeks out the lost; the second parable primarily reveals God's heart concerning the thoroughness in how he seeks what is lost.

a. The Parable of the Lost Sheep (vv. 3-7)

i. One sheep is lost out of a flock of 100 sheep (v. 4a)

A shepherd by overseeing and feeding his flock in the fields realizes that out of one hundred sheep, one is missing.

ii. The shepherd seeks the one sheep (v. 4b)

The value of the one sheep is great. The shepherd is not careless here in leaving the ninety-nine, the implication is that they are safe and that he must seek and save *the one that is lost*. The one is valuable and important to the shepherd. The focus of the shepherd is on the *lost sheep* because the other sheep are safe and sound.

It is important to compare this passage with Matthew 18:12-14. In Matthew, the parable illustrates the pastoral care we must have for

sheep within the fold who have gone astray; this deals with the behavior of believers (look at larger context of Matthew 18:6-11, 15-18):

ESV Matthew 18:12-14: What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

Though the images are similar, the message is different. Here in Dr. Luke's gospel the shepherd is not searching for sheep who have wandered who were once part of the community of believers in the Church. Rather, ***the shepherd in the parable is searching for lost sheep far away from the covenant who have never known the life within the Church community.*** The shepherd is searching for one who has never had the privilege of hearing of the forgiveness of sins and the privilege of living life in covenant with God.

iii. The sheep is found and there is rejoicing (v. 5)

The shepherd takes the sheep on his shoulders and carries him home. This emphasizes the great compassion and love of the shepherd and the fickle weakness and/or inability for the sheep to find its way home.

If any of you has ever lost a child in a busy place say a mall or an amusement park. You will do all you can to seek and find that child. You may leave your family in order to go search for the child with no hindrances. You will seek, and you will seek, until you find your beloved child –***then you will thank God- -and rejoice.***

This is a wonderful and gracious picture of how God finds his lost children and picks them up in His arms and carries them back home, rejoicing as he goes. These children were those who did not seek after God, and would not willfully follow Him without first a great work of grace wrought in their hearts (cf. Romans 3:11 ff; Ephesians 2:1 ff).

To think of ourselves as dear to God as this, to think of ourselves as His people as those whom he loves dearly and are of great value to him, helps us to understand the gracious heart and character of God that is found in Jesus Christ!

This parabolic picture is taken from Isaiah's prophecy concerning the ministry of Messiah when he comes:

ESV Isaiah 40:11 He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

ESV Isaiah 49:22 Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.

iv. Rejoicing with others because what was lost is now found (v. 6)

The sheep could have been mangled by another stronger animal; the sheep could have been stolen or permanently lost; but that is not the case- -the sheep is found and this is great reason for rejoicing!

v. A Picture of Heaven: Rejoicing over a sinner repenting! (v. 7)

Jesus uses this first brief parable as part of His Messianic-Prophetic Mission of declaring God's word is to remind the Pharisees and Scribes to understand themselves as God's shepherds who have been given an awesome task of caring for His sheep in Israel.

Jesus' primary goal in telling this is to cause the Pharisees and Scribes to repent of their unfaithfulness as shepherds. Rather than to criticize Jesus in reaching out to sinners, the Pharisees and Scribes (yea, all true disciples of the Kingdom) are to do the same with the message of hope in the gospel of the Kingdom that Jesus is making known.

Jesus' aim in teaching them is also to bring forth a response of repentance in them as well- -just as with the tax collectors and sinners- -but perhaps even more so because they do not see themselves as the true sinners that they are before God.

As we learn in Ezekiel 34, the shepherds of Israel had many times proved unfaithful. So great was their unfaithfulness, that God himself says that He will be the Great Shepherd and fulfill their task as he reaches out and seeks His people:

ESV Ezekiel 34:1-6, 10-16: The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord GOD: Ah, shepherds of Israel who have been feeding yourselves! Should not shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the fat ones, but you do not feed the sheep. ⁴ The weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them. ⁵ So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild

beasts. ⁶ *My sheep were scattered; they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over all the face of the earth, with none to search or seek for them....*

^{ESV} Ezekiel 34:10 Thus says the Lord GOD, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand and put a stop to their feeding the sheep. No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. ¹¹ "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

Like the unfaithful shepherds during the Prophet Ezekiel's time, so also the Pharisees and Scribes of the Prophet Jesus' time are failing in their calling and misunderstanding their main mission for God's Kingdom in this world.

Yet despite the failure of Israel's teachers, God himself will come and "Immanuel" himself as *God with us* as the True and Faithful Shepherd Jesus identifies himself as God who has come in the fullness of time to fulfill the Prophecy of Ezekiel. In John's Gospel Jesus says I AM the Great and Faithful Shepherd of the sheep:

^{ESV} John 10:14-16: I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

At the end of the passage there is rejoicing, as Jesus desires for the Pharisees and Scribes to understand and join in. Rather than grumbling and complaining about Jesus' table fellowship and the social implications thereof; rather than thinking of themselves more highly than they ought in their righteous reflections—*they too, should be rejoicing over these sinners who repent*- - BUT they reveal that they are not believers who can do such a thing.

In fact, according to the Jewish scholar Alfred Edersheim, there was a Pharisaical Jewish saying at this time that said: "There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world" (*The Life and Time of Jesus the Messiah*, pg. 256). In contrast to this, Jesus tells them to rejoice when sinners repent- -not when they perish and get what they deserve!

We must all understand that the only way to be able to rejoice with heaven over a sinner repenting and being received and restored by God is to have had this experience yourself! Part of the purpose of the parable is to indict the unrighteousness and self-centered importance of the Pharisees and Scribes and cause them to realize that in their rejection of Jesus, they cannot be called “righteous” before God (as they assume that they are).

If they reject Christ and do not rejoice in sinners being transformed by the power and grace of God, they prove themselves to be unrighteous before the living God and they will be punished for their sins.

Also, it is important to note that in the rejoicing we see that God rejoices when any sinner is led back to him through Jesus’ Kingdom ministry. ***The rejoicing in heaven is over the fact that what was lost in the fall has now been restored in Jesus Christ.***

b. The Parable of the Lost Coin (vv. 8-10)

The second parable reveals the heart of God in how he ***thoroughly searches for the lost in Jesus Christ.***

- i. One coin is lost out of a piggy bank of 10 silver coins (v. 8a)

I cannot even imagine the frustration of this woman in losing a coin; I “lose” things around my home daily, and it is not always fun to go looking for them; it can be quite frustrating. If it is something of great value like this coin, it is not only frustrating but can be fearful.

- ii. The woman seeks diligently for the coin (drachma) (v. 8b)

For some this may seem like she is diligently and thoroughly searching for a “small thing”; but in the eyes of the woman, this one coin is an extremely important thing that she must find! I think of how little others might think of certain Christians (how unimportant and miniscule they be in other’s eyes with regard to their social or financial position in this world), but we are to learn that they may be of little importance in this world, *but they are extremely valuable to the living God as his precious own!*

The woman in the parable is a presumably a peasant woman living in a home with no window (or very small windows) and therefore she must use a lamp to search thoroughly for the lost coin (a drachma).

These coins would have been of great value to her. For a peasant woman in an ancient village this would have represented perhaps her

“family savings” totally the equivalent of about ten days’ wages (Green, pg. 576). To lose this one coin would have meant possible hunger and potential devastation in her life. So she searches for this coin that is very valuable to her and she conducts her search thoroughly with *determination and passion*.

iii. The coin is found and there is rejoicing (v. 9)

iv. Rejoicing with others because what was lost is now found (v. 9)

The woman calls “the girls” over to tell them of her great recovery (Her friends in Greek are in the feminine). She rejoices together in fellowship with others and aligns herself with the party that is already in progress within heaven itself!

v. A Picture of Heaven: Rejoicing over a sinner repenting! (v. 10)

How will the Pharisees and Scribes respond to these two parables? Will they rejoice with Jesus in their repentance and restoration to God? We will look further at this in our next sermon on *The Prodigal God*.

What do these parables reveal about the character and love of God that is revealed in Jesus Christ and His Kingdom?

Sinners can hope in Jesus!

What we should first understand is that a sinner can find forgiveness and a reunion with God their Creator through Jesus Christ. ***No matter how sinful one’s life and behavior has been, a sinner who realizes their sin before God, can find forgiveness and a new life a new creation in Jesus Christ.*** Listen to the description of the Church at Corinth:

ESV 1 Corinthians 1:2 To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours...

The City of Corinth has a historic reputation of being one of the most blatantly sinful cities of the ancient world. Yet those sinners who had repented had been restored to fellowship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Those sinners could even be called presently by God’s grace those who are ***“sanctified in Christ Jesus”*** even though they had a wicked past. Notice what the Apostle Paul says to these repentant believers “sanctified in Christ Jesus; he reminds them of their past as a reminder of the work that God has done within them by his grace alone:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who

practice homosexuality,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

“And such were some of you...” Listen to the list of heinous sins in this congregation of believers alone: “Sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, homosexuals, greedy drunkards, revilers and swindlers” BUT by faith they have received salvation in Jesus. *They have been “washed, sanctified, justified” in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God!*

Such were some of you, too! Such was I, too!

Yet God in his grace searched diligently and thoroughly for us and saved us. We must never forget the great debt Jesus paid for our sins, how relentless he was in seeking us out, finding us, and carrying us back to God in order to be forgiven and restored to fellowship and peace with God (cf. Romans 5:6-11).

Let us not grow presumptuous upon God's favor; let us never take his grace for granted. Let us never forget when viewing the “tax collectors and sinners” who live among us today that God cares for his own, and will seek them out with the good news of Jesus Christ.

We should remember that no matter how godless and sinful a person may be, only God knows those who are His, and so we should approach all sinners with hopes that God will save them, and that they are *potentially future repentant people* who will find hope and salvation in Jesus Christ!

Let us never think we are better than other sinners; let us never underestimate the grace that has been shown to us; let us never forget the great price of Christ's precious blood to redeem us.

Let us never forget the heart of God that is revealed here in his love for the lost. God himself rejoices over one sinner who repents and finds salvation in His Beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Let us also have the mindset as God's people to pray to seek the lost, to sup with them, to break bread with them in order that we might make known to them the Gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom.

Honestly, when was the last time that you were not merely “NICE” to a sinner, but sat down and attempted to build a relationship with him or her so that they might know Jesus Christ? If this is what gets God's excited and rejoicing, then let us pray it might get us excited too!

The Pharisees and Scribes reveal themselves as unbelievers in this passage (and in many other places (cf. Luke 7:30; 23:21ff). It would not be biblical or fair to compare these two groups as both those who are different types of believers in Christ's Church. It is not true that believers can truly be Pharisees and Scribes for

then they would be unbelievers. **But believers can sometimes fall into their Pharisaical way of thinking.**

Believers in Christ's Church can rely too much on their own righteousness before God and not be thankful for the grace of God that has transformed them in Christ. Believers in Christ's Church can be overly judgmental and proud about their position in Christ and avoid modern "tax collectors and sinners" for the wrong reasons.

We should remember that because God is a seeker and a diligent one at that, God seeks thoroughly and relentlessly until his own sinful people come to him. We should be reminded that because of this merciful character of God that is revealed, NO SINNER IS EVER BEYOND HOPE HERE IN THIS WORLD- - THERE IS ALWAYS A HOPE THAT THEY WOULD REPENT AND BE SAVED!

We should not be fearful of contamination in the same superstitious way as the Pharisees and Scribes- -we are contaminated enough ourselves still in many ways with our problem of indwelling sin that still remains- -we have not fully been sanctified. We should understand that we have a Kingdom Mission as God's people to reach the lost by God's grace.

We do not meet our unbelieving family members, friends and neighbors on their sinful terms necessarily or we might become like them in their sinful practices (cf. 1 Cor. 15:33). If we are immature in certain areas and we have still struggles with certain sinful practices, it would be wise not to be those who minister to other sinners with the same practices.

We do not as Christians take part in the sinful behavior, sinful thinking, and sinful activities of our unbelieving family members, friends and neighbors; we are to be obedient to God in reliance upon his grace so that they will see our good works and praise God for them (Matthew 5:13-16).

Seeking sinners might take many years, but we are to build relationships with sinners so that we might always be there when they need us and we will have the opportunity by God's grace ***to tell them and show them of the great hope God has shown to us as he sought us.*** Let us seek to search diligently and search thoroughly for those who are lost that God has placed around us every day.

Let us be faithful people of Christ's Church, and let us be identified as those committed to Christ's visible church and His worship. Let us also be those who come out from worship, nourished by Word, Sacrament, prayer and God's grace to be those who seek the lost to join us in Church and worship.

Seeking Wisely

We should meet sinners where they are and attempt to make the gospel as clear as we can to them. ***We should seek to befriend sinners who are lost, to let them***

know that we care and are there for them- -but we must do this prayerfully and wisely. We should seek not to endorse or promote or engage in their sinful behavior and practices, but to teach of Jesus Christ and to let them know that through repentance and faith in Christ, they too can know the salvation of God!

Some Christians have said that they were ministering to the lost in certain relationships and they became perhaps unintentionally immersed in the sinners' behavior rather than turning them toward Christ in repentance. Why? Because they were foolish and forgot that they too had sinful inclinations and so we should never seek the lost in order to be like them, or merely to be with them, but we should seek them in order that we might show Christ and that they would repent.

When I met my wonderful wife Margaret over 18 years ago (Wow! How time flies...) she was not a Christian. I thought highly of her as a person and she had become my friend. I wanted to share the gospel with her, but I was concerned that I would get involved too much. I prayed and asked God that he would help me to find the right time and place in order to meet with her (and I was privately thinking she was a wonderful person –but I was in a bind because she was not a believer).

One day after worship, she asked me to come over for lunch. I was able to share the gospel with her and she became a transformed Christian by God's grace and within the next year she became my wife. However, I had resolved that because of my potential sinfulness, and my private attraction to her that if she did not repent when I told her the gospel, I would let someone else minister to her (I knew my weaknesses).

We should be hopeful that all sinners will repent when the gospel is shared with them, but we must be wise and not get too close if we begin to see how the sinner can influence us rather than we influence them; young people especially be mindful of this, and particularly when seeking relationships with those of the opposite sex. ***All of us know when we are too close and that we are not the ones that should wisely continue to seek.*** In this case, you should pray and ask God to send someone else to that person lest you end up with someone that becomes a stumbling block that trips you up rather than a true convert to Jesus Christ.

Then we can rejoice with heaven when some of our unbelieving family, friends and neighbors find repentance and restoration by God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Jess the Great and Gracious Shepherd Who Seeks His People

Jesus is the Great and Gracious Shepherd who searches diligently for his sheep until he finds them. Jesus is the Great Shepherd who has come to save the unrighteous, the sinful, those who need God's forgiving grace.

^{ESV} ***Psalm 28:9 Oh, save your people and bless your heritage! Be their shepherd and carry them forever.***

ESV Isaiah 46:4 even to your old age I am he, and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save.

On the cross, we see the ultimate picture of God's seeking repentant sinners when Jesus as the Great Shepherd gives his life for the sheep, shedding his own precious blood NOT FOR RIGHTEOUS PEOPLE FOR LOST SINNERS!

ESV Romans 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

On the cross, we see Jesus carrying our sins and burdens, so that we might receive his righteousness and be yoked to him as our Master and Lord. The Apostle Peter described it in this way:

ESV 1 Peter 2:22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. ²⁵ For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

God rejoices with all of Heaven (all of the angels in His Heavenly court) when a sinner repents!

Repent! Call upon the LORD while He may be found and while He is near! If you have repented and are a Kingdom Disciple of Jesus, wisely seek the lost diligently and thoroughly calling them to repentance, too!

Thanks be to God for His Word!

CRB

Scripture Lesson

Ezekiel 34:11-16; Isaiah 40:8-11; Luke 18:9-14; Isaiah 53:6; 2 Peter 3:9; Ezekiel 18:23

Ezekiel 34:11-16: "For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. ¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

Isaiah 40:8-11: The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever. ⁹ Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord GOD comes with might, and his arm rules for him; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him. ¹¹ He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young.

Luke 14:15-24: When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" ¹⁶ But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet and invited many. ¹⁷ And at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' ¹⁸ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it. Please have me excused.' ¹⁹ And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them. Please have me excused.' ²⁰ And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹ So the servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house became angry and said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame.' ²² And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' ²³ And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

Luke 18:9-14: He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."

Isaiah 53:6: 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.

2 Peter 3:9: The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

Ezekiel 18:23: Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?

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