



**Christ the Friend of Sinners
Luke 15:1-10**

- NKJ Luke 15:1 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.
 2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."
 3 So He spoke this parable to them, saying:
 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which 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 neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'
 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.
 8 " Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?
 9 "And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!'
 10 "Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

It is an easy thing to say "I love you" and simply saying it, even if we use a French accent - "*I Love You*" – does not necessarily make it so. Now if the ministry of Jesus had consisted of merely going around Palestine telling people that God loved them, men might have had legitimate cause to doubt whether that was indeed true. I can tell you that the check is in the mail but until it actually shows up, doubt is inevitable.

But Jesus didn't merely say that God loves men, He proved the awesome love of God to fallen man by coming to earth expressly to save them from their sins at the greatest possible cost. ***1 John 4:10 "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."***

That was after all the reason that Christ came to earth, as He himself said ***"for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*** At this time of year, we are constantly reminded of the baby Jesus in the manger, and it was indeed a great thing for the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity to take on flesh and come to dwell with His people, the purpose of His doing so was not merely to make a friendly visit. Christ was born to save us from Satan's power when we had gone astray. As the Angel told Joseph ***"You shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."***

It was not in the manger that Christ saved His people, but in His death on the cross. As Iain Murray put it so well in a recent edition of the Banner of Truth, *The Cross is the Pulpit of God's Love*.

So it should have been no surprise that in his earthly ministry, Jesus the lover of men's souls, was constantly about His Father's business of seeking out the lost sheep of Israel that he came to save. That meant being amongst them and that offended the Pharisees and scribes to no end, "***This man receives sinners and eats with them!***" Their assumption was, that if Jesus spent such time in the company of sinners, it just went to prove that He was a sinner Himself. By that logic of course, all Doctors are Sick, and all Teachers are Uneducated.

Jesus answers the objections of the Pharisees with three parables which together form one of the most beloved chapters in the Bible. It is difficult to think of anywhere else in the Bible where the lost are given such good reason to repent and such strong assurance that even the most wicked of sinners can find forgiveness through the redeeming love of God. Today, we'll look at the first two and next week, we'll finish with the story of the Prodigal son.

In the first parable Jesus asks what shepherd, if only one sheep out of a hundred wandered off, would not leave the flock and go in search of it? And then when he finds the lost sheep, the shepherd drapes him over his shoulders, and holds a party to celebrate.

In so doing Jesus is implicitly asking the Pharisees, "*you claim to be the shepherds of Israel, why then are you condemning me for searching for lost sheep? If you truly were shepherds, wouldn't you be doing the same? Instead you stay with flock and say, eh what value are sheep that wander away, let them go, they deserve whatever they get.*" Now the identity of the lost sheep is easy to discern, these are the lost sinners who are wandering in the world. These are people on the broad path that leads to destruction They are in gravest of danger, for like sheep in the wilderness they are in danger of being devoured at any moment, and to be swallowed up eternally by hellfire.

But like Sheep they are blissfully unaware of their danger, they are not seeking the Lord, and they will not do so. Left to their own devices, they will become more and more lost. But the love of God is seen in this that He seeks them out, finds them, and makes them His. **1 John 4:19 "We love Him because He first loved us."** It is Christ the Good Shepherd who seeks and saves sinners, not they who save themselves. Once he has done this, those sheep who are His will never finally leave Him and He will never leave them or forsake them. The love between the saved and the savior is both eternal and boundless.

Now the question has been asked, who are the 99 just persons who need no repentance? Are they really the righteous, or are they the self-righteous? Commentators have come down on both sides, but here I think we need to apply the rule of letting scripture interpret scripture.

First off scripture tells us "All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way;" (Is. 53:6) So everyone of the redeemed was at one time a wandering sheep – No one is born righteous, we are all brought forth in sin and iniquity and each of us must be sought and saved by Jesus. So the flock of Christ is made up entirely of wandering sheep who have been found. Redeemed sinners. So there simply aren't people who weren't in need of repentance, just people who don't think they need to repent.

Secondly Jesus has had a conversation very like this with the Pharisees already, in Luke 5:30-32

30 And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

31 Jesus answered and said to 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."

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, to be the great physician of the soul to sick, to call sinners to repentance. The Pharisees assumed they were none of these things, as we read in Luke 18:9 **"Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others:"**

But who really needs to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in order to be saved? Everyone!

Acts 17:30 "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent,

That is why the angels in heaven themselves rejoice when someone repents and believes in the Lord! Jesus is once again pointing out to these men, **you don't think you need to be saved, you are trusting in your own works to save you. But these outright sinners that I eat and drink with have no such illusions about their state, and they are being saved through faith in Me.** That is why elsewhere Jesus was able to say to the Pharisees in Matt. 21:31 "Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you." They were being added to the flock, forever redeemed. But the Pharisees, because they were not guilty of the same ostentatious sinning remained outside. It is often the case that the eyes of the big sinner are opened to see their predicament and need of Christ while the eyes of the "moral and respectable unbeliever" remain closed.

What of the lost coin? Finding something lost is a tedious and wearisome process but if the object lost is valuable, you'll take the trouble to find it. We have lost the clicker to our DVD player, so I got down on the floor of the den with a pokey little flashlight with a bad battery and spent ages peering under the couch and the chairs and the ottoman and behind the toy chests and searched for it for some time. What struck me was all the things that I found under those chairs apart from the clicker. Mostly toys, but the point is, we hadn't been searching for them – why? Because they weren't valuable, their loss wasn't even noticed.

Why aren't the Pharisees searching for these lost sinners? Because they are valueless to them. They are worth nothing in their eyes, social garbage, unlovely and utterly contemptible. But that's not the case with Christ, not at all. The lost are as precious to Him as silver coins are to a poor woman. So that when she loses it she will light a lamp and sweep the dirt floor until it turns up.

Why does Christ love them so much? So much that He is willing to do the hardest work of all in seeking them out and saving them? Is it because he isn't aware of how serious their sins are? Is there some secret quality to them he can see that the Pharisees can't discern, some secret loveliness that attracts Him to them? Perhaps it's because they love Him? No, that can't be it, even John told us **"We love Him because He first loved us." This love of Christ is a love which passes knowledge. And yet it is founded not on what we have done or will do, it is founded on his incomprehensible love in election.**

7 "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples;

8 *"but because the LORD loves you,*

It is as difficult for us to fathom this love a love that allowed God to love us when we were yet his enemies, it is a humbling love that leaves no room for pride, but it is the greatest of all loves, for it results in our salvation and is cause even for the angels to rejoice.

Let me give you two final applications related to this Love of Christ

- 1) **We Must experientially know and trust in the Love of Christ:** *Please understand that this is different from knowing of the love of Christ. Someone can teach me all about apples, I can become an expert myself in apples, I could discriminate between a Fuji a Gala and a McIntosh in a moment just from their external appearance, but if I never eaten an apple, what would I really know about Apples?*

It is possible to have heard much of the Lord and His Goodness, but never really to have experienced it, to do that we must take the counsel of *Psalm 34:8 Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!* Put your faith in Christ and in His Unsearchable love even to the greatest of sinners – *This is the greatest and most efficacious love of all - "Christ's love is an active, working love. Just as the shepherd did not sit still bewailing his lost sheep, and the woman did not sit still bewailing her lost money, so our blessed Lord did not sit still in heaven pitying sinners. He left the glory which He had with the Father, and humbled Himself to be made in the likeness of man. He came down into the world to seek and save that which was lost. He never rested until He had made atonement for our transgressions, brought in everlasting righteousness, provided eternal redemption, and opened a door of life to all who are willing to be saved. ... Let us strive to know something of this love of Christ. It is a love that truly passes knowledge. It is unspeakable and unsearchable. It is that on which we must wholly rest our souls, if we would have peace in time, and glory in eternity. If we take comfort in our own love to Christ, we are building on a sandy foundation. But if we lean on Christ's love to us, we are on a rock."* – J.C. Ryle

- 2) **Emulate the Love of Christ:** If we are truly his people then we must not be like the Pharisees and in neglecting to seek and save the lost.

It is far too easy to see ourselves as the righteous, and to say as the Pharisees did, if they will repent and come to us, we will receive them.

Not at all! As our savior sought us out, we must seek out and direct the lost to Him! Jesus was a friend to sinners, we must be too. Now this doesn't mean become a sinner to save them, IN THE WORLD, BUT NOT OF THE WORLD (Church/ship Analogy vs. the Amish Model) but it does mean truly loving the *unlovely*.