

Jesus: The Seeking Savior, Part 1

Scripture: Luke 15

Code: 80-34

INTRODUCTION

Luke 19:10 says, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." Christ came into the world to rescue man from sin and hell. That is Luke's theme, and there is no better example of making disciples than our Lord Jesus Christ. Lesson

Luke 15 illustrates that theme. It begins, "All the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them'" (vv. 1-2).

"Sinners" were robbers, murderers, prostitutes, and others with bad reputations. They made no effort to live by Jewish law. "Tax-gatherers" were Jewish individuals hired by the Roman government who gouged their own people. The Jewish religious leaders therefore barred them from social and religious observances. To them it was unthinkable to associate with any sinner or tax collector. The Pharisees and scribes complained when Jesus did just that.

Some of those who came to Christ were aware of their sinfulness and need of salvation. Levi or Matthew left everything, including his tax-collecting business, to follow Christ (Luke 5:27-32). Also there was the tax collector who was unwilling to lift his eyes to heaven, crying out, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (Luke 18:13). Jesus said that man received salvation because "he who humbles himself [repents] shall be exalted" (v. 14).

So sinners and tax collectors, aware of their sin, responded to the seeking heart of Christ and gathered to listen to Him. The religious leaders, who lacked compassion, gathered to criticize Him. To both groups He gave three parables.

I. PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP (vv. 4-7)

A. Its Explanation (vv. 4-5)

"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

"What man among you" shows an expected practice. Every shepherd would seek a lost sheep, for it is not only a matter of duty but also of affection. When the shepherd found the lost sheep, "he [laid] it on his shoulders." Pulling the sheep's belly against his neck, the shepherd returned the sheep to the fold.

B. Its Application (vv. 6-7)

"When he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

After arriving at his home, the shepherd invited people over to celebrate with him because he found the lost sheep. The shepherd's joy was so great he had to share it. A better translation of verse 7 would read: "There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, rather than over ninety-nine." The application is that the seeking Shepherd rejoices over the repentant sinner, for He has found His lost sheep.

II. PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN (vv. 8-10)

A. Its Explanation (v. 8)

"Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?"

One of those coins was the equivalent of a day's wages. Anyone who had lost that much money would be expected to look for it. Since floors were made of dirt in those days, the coin could have easily found its way under some surface dirt. The woman swept the dirt until she found the coin.

B. Its Application (vv. 9-10)

"And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Because she had found the coin, she had great joy and wanted others to share in it. God also has great joy when He finds a repentant sinner. "In the presence of the angels" indicates God's rejoicing in their presence. Of course His angels would rejoice too.

III. PARABLE OF THE LOST SONS (vv. 11-32)

A. The Younger Son (vv. 11-20a)

The parable begins, "A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' And he divided his wealth between them" (vv. 11-12). It involves two lost sons. That is indicated by the father's dividing the wealth between "them"-- apparently both were present at the time of the request, with the younger serving as the spokesman. According to the customs of the Middle East, demanding an early inheritance was a show of great disrespect to one's father. It was the equivalent of a death wish. But the father was gracious and gave them their inheritance.

1. His ruin (vv. 13-16)

"Not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be in need. And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him."

Shortly after receiving his wealth, the younger son decided to journey to a faraway land. There he lived without restraints and consumed all his fortune. Then a famine came. Now dependent on others to meet his needs, he had to get a job. He ended up feeding pigs--unclean animals according to Jewish ceremonial law. He became so hungry he wanted to eat pig feed, but apparently he could not do it. Neither did anyone provide other food for him. He was starving.

2. His repentance (vv. 17-20a)

"But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'" And he got up and came to his father."

He realized if he did not remedy his situation, he would die. So he lamented his circumstances. And out of his circumstances came the beginnings of repentance because he accepted responsibility for his condition: "I will ... go.... [I] will say to him" (emphasis added). He then prepared his words of confession, admitting first that he had he sinned against "heaven" (God). He saw beyond offending his human father to God, whose law requires men and women to honor their parents and live righteously. "In your sight" shows admission of sin against his human father as well. Ingratitude and unruly living violated his father's standards. In humility and meekness the son recognized he was not

worthy of sonship, desiring only to be his father's slave. So he began journeying home, which was evidence of his repentance or turning from sin.

B. The Seeking Father (vv. 20b-24)

The heart of the parable is the seeking father, representing God. One can overlook that point by focusing too much on the sons.

1. His compassion (v. 20b)

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him, and kissed him."

"While he was still a long way off" shows no sinner can approach God on his own or even seek God (Rom. 3:11). Not until God does His work does the sinner begin to seek. "His father saw him" may indicate a daily watch from some high point on the ground. Seeing his son in a dilapidated condition, the father felt compassion and ran to embrace him, kissing him fervently.

2. His celebration (vv. 21-24)

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the Father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry."

Embraced in his father's love, the son confessed his sinfulness. But apparently before the son made petition for servanthood, the father summoned his slaves and took over the conversation. In the spirit of forgiveness, the father provided his son with fine clothing, a ring, and a big party. The father celebrated finding his lost son.

C. The Older Son (vv. 25-32)

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things might be. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he became angry, and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began entreating him. But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you, and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a kid, that I might be merry with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with harlots, you killed the fattened calf for him.' And he said to him, 'My child, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'"

The first son represents the sinners and tax collectors, while the second son represents the scribes and Pharisees (vv. 1-2). The second son lacked compassion and forgiveness for sinners. He was self-righteous, not realizing that he too was lost. We see no evidence of confession of sin, repentance, or submission. He served his father only out of duty, not love. If he had loved his father, he would have shared his joy.

CONCLUSION

Luke is telling us our Lord seeks to save those who realize their sinfulness. In humility and repentance they submit themselves to the Lord's sovereign work and are willing to be slaves in His service. And the Father rejoices greatly when He finds people like that.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is Luke's theme?
2. Who were the "tax-gatherers and sinners" (Luke 15:1)? Name one who followed Christ.
3. Why did the shepherd rejoice (vv. 6-7)? What is a better translation of verse 7?
4. Why did the woman sweep her floor (vv. 9-10)? What is the spiritual application of that parable?

5. What did demanding an early inheritance show?
6. Describe the younger son's ruin (vv. 13-16).
7. State evidence of the younger son's repentance (vv. 17-20).
8. True or false: The theme of the parable of the lost sons is the father's seeking.
9. That the father saw his son from a distance conveys what spiritual truth?
10. How did the father outwardly demonstrate his compassion (v.20)?
11. Why did the father want to celebrate? How did he celebrate (vv. 21-24)?
12. The older son served his father out of _____, not _____.
13. What evidence shows the older son was lost?

Pondering the Principles

1. In the parable of the lost sons, the father forgave his wayward son. Christ's forgiveness of sinners (cf. Luke 23:34; Eph. 1:7) is the supreme example for us to follow in our relationships (cf. Matt. 18:21-22; Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:12-13). Have you received Christ's forgiveness? Are you characterized by a forgiving attitude toward others?
2. God greatly rejoices in saving the lost. Are you sharing that joy? Thomas Watson wrote, "Admire and adore God's free-grace in calling you ... that He should take you out of a state of vassalage, from grinding the devil's mill, and should set you above the princes of the earth, and call you to inherit the throne of glory! Fall upon your knees, break forth into a thankful triumph of praise; let your hearts be ten-stringed instruments, to sound forth the memorial of God's mercy." (All Things for Good [Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986], p. 119). Meditate on Psalm 103 in adoration of God's goodness.

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