

## ***Luke's Gospel: Chapter 15***

# ***The Joy of Finding the Lost...***

### ***Introduction (Luke 15 v 1, 2)***

Luke Chapter 15, one of the most beloved chapters in the Bible, is made up of three parables (which are found only in Luke's gospel). Jesus told these parables in response to the accusation, "this man receives sinners and eats with them" (v 2). The Pharisees divided people into two classes: 'sinners' and the righteous, and they would have nothing to do with 'sinners'. Sadly, many followers of Jesus do the same today. The rabbis were so serious about not associating with 'sinners', they even refused to teach them the word of God.

The three parables have one thing in common: they all concern something that mattered, but that was lost. The lost sheep *mattered* to the shepherd; the lost silver coin *mattered* to the woman; the younger son *mattered* to the father. If there is one lesson we can learn from these parables, it is that *people (all people) matter to God* – and if they matter to God, then they should surely matter to us...

### ***The parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15 v 3 to 7)***

The shepherd's concern is for the *lost* sheep; the one who is not lost is not of immediate concern. When he finds the sheep, the shepherd is *happy*, not angry. "He lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing" (v 5) – when Jesus finds us, he carries us too.

The rabbis believed that God would only receive a sinner who came to him the right way. But in this parable, Jesus teaches us that God actively seeks out the lost. This was a completely alien thought to Jesus' audience of religious leaders: they believed they were more righteous than others, because they had diligently sought God while others had not.

"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (v 7) – the message is clear: there is joy in heaven when the lost are found and they come to repentance. Even though there may be no joy among the Pharisees, there is joy in heaven!

### ***The parable of the lost coin (Luke 15 v 8 to 10)***

If the shepherd was interested in 'one in a hundred', then it makes sense that the woman would be interested in 'one in ten'. She does not just give up the coin as lost and care nothing about it. It is possible this coin refers to one that was worn with several others on a silver chain around the neck as a mark of a married woman – this would have been a precious ornament, and that would make the loss all the more keenly felt.

"Light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently" (v 8) – just as the lost sheep would be hard to find in the hill country, so a small coin would be hard to find on a dirt floor. "Until she finds it" – why does Jesus associate with sinners? Because it is in God's nature to want to recover things that are lost, just like us.

"There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (v 10) – God and the angels rejoice when one who was lost is found. We don't often think of God as 'rejoicing', but this passage tells us that he does, and under what circumstances. See also Isaiah 62 v 5; and Zephaniah 3 v 17.

***[MORE OVER...]***

## ***The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15 v 11 to 32)***

“Give me the share of property that is coming to me” (v 12) – in those days, a father could grant the inheritance either before or after his death, though it was usually done after. The younger son asks for a special favour. The father clearly illustrates God’s love, that allows rebellion and respects a person’s will. The father knew what would happen to the son, but allowed him to go on his course nonetheless. The son left home to become independent of his father, but soon found himself in a worse predicament than ever.

“When he came to himself” (v 17) – he did not join a self-help group; he did not blame his friends, his boss, or the pigs. He decided to go back to his father (v 18). Jesus does not say that the son returned to his village, or to his home, but *to his father*. That is how we need to come back to God: to come back to him first and foremost, before coming back to church, or back to Christian friends.

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants” (v 18, 19). The son displays his sense of unworthiness and confesses his sin. In a sense, we must also do this in order to receive God’s forgiveness. We must come to God willing to be his servants (slaves), but by his love, he makes us his sons and daughters. See Romans 8 v 15 to 17.

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (v 20) – the father had a love that waited, and never forgot the one who was loved, even when he was away. It was a love that fully received, not putting the son on probation.

“Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate” (v 22, 23) – none of the things brought to the son were necessities: they were all meant to honour the son and make him know that he was loved. The father does much more than merely meet the son’s needs.

“I never disobeyed... you never gave me” (v 29) – these kinds of exaggerations are common for those who harbour bitterness in their hearts. Now it finally comes out before the father, but the bitterness has already done its corrosive damage. “But he was angry and refused to go in” (v 28) – the older son was obedient, but far from his father’s heart: he would not even see his younger brother.

The older son is a perfect picture of the Pharisees, who were angry that God would receive the lost crowds coming to Jesus. But notice that the father also loved the older son, and he came out after him as well.

### ***Summary***

- What does the parable of the prodigal son teach us about sin, repentance and the love of God? How passionately does the father receive the son (v 20)?
- How do these parables answer the Pharisees’ objections in verse 2? What is God eager to see happen, and to bring about? What are the Pharisees meant to learn from these parables?

Each of the three stories illustrates a different way of being lost:

- The sheep was lost by foolish wandering, and so are many people today.
- The coin was lost by what someone else did, and we are lost because of what Adam did.
- The son was lost because of rebellion, and a submissive return was necessary.

We should never miss the main point: Jesus is answering the criticism “this man receives sinners and eats with them” (v 2) – Jesus seeks sinners, as a shepherd seeks after a lost sheep, a woman seeks after a lost coin, and a father seeks after a lost son. It is only natural for the Son of God to seek the lost. But is it natural for us to seek lost people? Do people really *matter* to us? Do we have the heart of God?