

## LUKE 15:1 - 17:19

In this section, Jesus speaks to three different audiences addressing the unique needs of each. To the tax collectors and sinners, he tells stories illustrating God's eagerness to seek out the lost and God's joy in finding them. To the disciples he speaks about faithfulness and obedience. To the Pharisees he cautions against arrogant self-righteousness, hard-heartedness and the love of money, all of which keep them from being instruments of God's healing and salvation.

### 15: 1-32 - Parables of the Lost and Found

1-2 – Here we have the context for why Jesus tells these parables. The arrogant self-righteousness and hard-heartedness of the religious authorities blocks them from compassion and forgiveness for their fellow Israelites. Sadly, their lack of love is also alienating them from God and God's kingdom vision as Jesus is proclaiming it. The consequences can become irreversible after a certain point.

The parables describe what God is like versus the elder brother in the last parable, who represents the religious authorities.

3-7 – the joy of heaven (God and God's people) is in the lost sheep being found. God is like the shepherd who is not willing to lose even one and will go to the great risk and trouble of looking for the lost one.

8-10 – God is like the woman who rejoices when she finds her lost coin and throws a party to celebrate.

11-32 – The lost son is welcomed by his father with total, forgiving love. His repentance is welcomed by complete restoration and celebration. The elder son excludes himself from the celebration. He is resentful, bitter and hard-hearted. He is angry at his father. The religious authorities never imagine that their hard-heartedness toward their fellow Israelites who have moral flaws is actually a rejection of God who wants to forgive. Forgiveness comes from a heart hungry for reconciliation not stubbornly holding a grudge and refusing to forgive even those who are open and repentant.

Love generates repentance much better than angry demands for restitution. It's because there is a positive way forward and hope for restored relationship. It's much harder for anger to be let go even when some repentance has been offered. Anger easily fuels the desire to retaliate and humiliate.

### 16: 1-18 – Parable of the Dishonest Manager and Faithfulness

The parable (vs.1-9) itself seems to contradict everything Jesus has been teaching. Yet, Jesus gets people's attention by offering a twist to what they expect to hear. The manager is not commended because he is dishonest or because he loves money. In the verses that follow (10-18) Jesus is clear that neither dishonesty nor the love of money is

rewarded in the kingdom of God. Rather, it is faithfulness that counts. The Manager is faithful in applying his resources and intelligence toward his own self-interest. Saving his own skin at all costs is what matters to him. Applying that to the self-interest of those who want to enter the kingdom of God would mean being faithful to God's will in letting go attachment to money, a willingness to share, a commitment to be honest with others and faithful in relationships. It is for their self-interest to be faithful in order to gain eternal benefit which is much more valuable and lasting than worldly benefits like money. Worldly benefits are fleeting and too often one becomes dishonest in order to gain them.

#### 16: 19-31 – Parable of Rich Man and Lazarus

This leads to another parable about the evil of riches, especially at the cost of ignoring and neglecting the poor. Attachment to riches and the need to have money can be so all-consuming, that even if one were raised from the dead to warn a person, it would have little effect. The law and the prophets make very clear that loving God with heart, mind and strength and loving the neighbour as oneself is an uncompromising call. We love with our generous giving and sharing of money as much as with our heart.

#### 17: 1-10 – Teaching on forgiveness, faith and faithfulness

To be faithful to God is to give positive guidance to the vulnerable and ignorant. To be faithful is to be open to forgive, and repeatedly, especially if there is some repentance. To be faithful is to trust God in challenging times, to be open to what God can do through you. To be faithful is to obey God's will without expecting rewards or promotions.

#### 17: 11-19 – 10 Lepers and Gratitude

What does it mean to follow Jesus? It doesn't matter who you are, your background, your education, status, gender, etc. Behaviour defines your relationship to Jesus and at the top are the virtues that grow out of compassion. Gratitude is a recognition that someone has done something for me that they didn't have to do. It's not about what I am worthy of or deserve. It is not about what is received in return. It is done from the heart and gratitude is from the heart. The irony is that the only one of the lepers who returns to thank Jesus for the healing is a Samaritan (an outsider who is thought of as morally deficient). His gratitude from the heart puts him ahead of Israelites who have their health and their identity as 'people of God' but their hard-heartedness and ingratitude excludes them from the kingdom. Without love there is no place for you in the kingdom. Only love gives you belonging.