**Parables Tell Of God**

 **Luke 15:1-10**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is your reason for being here today? Why did you gather in this house of God? Did you do it to show others how good you are? Or, did you gather for a Godly reason – to repent of your sins and receive the forgiveness and life Christ purchased?

I pray you are here to bring about joy in heaven, and to cause the angels in heaven to rejoice? You do know how to do that, don’t you? You do, if you were listening to the Gospel lesson earlier. Jesus told two parables, and at the end of each made statements referring to joy in heaven.

At the end of the first parable He said, “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety‑nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

At the end of the second parable He said, “Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Of course, to understand these conclusions to His parables, we must first remember the situation in which Jesus told the parables, and made these statements. Luke introduces our account by saying of Jesus, “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.”

Tax collectors – traitors to Israel, worse than sinners. These people are even despised by the “sinners.” They had come to have the position by bidding for it, and were usually “Jews” who then collected the taxes they levied upon their fellow Jews, usually with a hefty surcharge which they used to line their own pockets.

Sinners – these are the ones everybody knows are sinners. Prostitutes, social outcasts, those who by Jewish standards, were undesirable, the losers. We might think that they are unholy and unclean, and they were. But this is more than that, their sinfulness was obvious to everybody.

So, who is the worst sinner in town? Better yet, who is the worst sinner who is a member of this congregation? I know you have an answer – if not a name you would state out loud, it is a name you know about in your heart – and possibly a name that you have mentioned with your friends over a couple cocktails. Or snickered about when you saw them in town.

You know how it goes. Francis Finklestein saw the pastor at Farm Inn having lunch with Cora Cladiddlehoffer. Next thing you know, Francis is on the phone calling every one of her friends from church, complaining about how pastor could be so stupid as to be seen eating a meal with her – alone with her – in public. She even started crying and the pastor patted her on the head. It got even worse, and the phone lines started burning up after Cora showed up at church – and pastor communed her.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So Jesus tells a parable. "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?”

If given the opportunity to answer, we would say, “No one!” Let’s face it, there is no intelligent shepherd that would leave ninety-nine sheep in the open country to go after one that is lost. No one forsakes the needs of the many for the good of the one. If you lose one, you count your losses and keep better eye on the rest.

Not God. God seeks and saves the lost! It is God’s goal to seek and to save sinners. It is why Jesus came, to die for sinners. As Jesus concludes, “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety‑nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

The ninety-nine who think they are good – the ninety-nine who think they are better and not in the same boat as the “real” sinners – those do not want to be found. Until someone is brought to see their sinfulness and led to repentance, they see no need for forgiveness – they see no need for a Savior. They are blind to Jesus.

But Jesus doesn’t end there. He is going to tell another parable about God. "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? 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.'”

First off, know that these coins are the equivalent of one day’s wage. So, she is not sweeping the floor for a quarter. She is searching for a coin that would be worth the equivalent of about one hundred twenty-five dollars (that is what someone with a family of four would make in Wisconsin and qualify for free school lunch). I do not know about you, but if finances are so tight that I cannot afford to lose one such coin (and personally, I could not), I would not go and spend two or more such coins to throw a party for finding the one that was lost.

But that is not how God thinks. Jesus is not you! Jesus is not normal! Both these parables are about God’s desire for those who are lost.

Jesus is in a situation where He is receiving sinners, He is going out to seek and to save the lost. He is bringing them to repentance for the forgiveness of sins. *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”*

Do the Pharisees and scribe understand their own situation? No! Which one is not a sinner? Which one of us is not a sinner? They see themselves as righteous before God, by their own works.

Jesus ends these two parables with similar comments. “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.” “Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

How many people see the word repent and think of it as something people do? Many have come to see repent as having to do with changing one’s heart, and especially changing one’s heart about one’s sins.

If that is true, then what about the two parables Jesus gives in our text? Did the lost sheep or the lost coin do anything? Did they have a change of heart or mind, suddenly becoming unlost?

Neither the lost sheep nor the lost coin was capable of changing their condition of lostness – neither was capable of changing their condition – they were incapable of repentance. The lost sheep was found solely because of the foolishness of the shepherd who left the ninety-nine alone in the open country to seek it out. And the lost coin was found because of the woman’s determination to seek it out. The lost were found because of the will and the work of the shepherd and the woman.

Likewise, the lost do not seek God.

We know that God is somewhere in these parables. We know that He is not the lost sheep. Nor is He the lost coin. God is in these parables. He is both the Shepherd and the woman. The coin and the sheep simply sit around in their state of lostness.

Dear friends, this means that it is precisely our sins that commend us most to the grace of God, not the things in us that we like to think are good. You are not commendable to God because you are better than your neighbor; more loving, more kind, more anything.

What is a sheep lost in the open country? Right! Supper for some predator! Of what value is a coin that is lost? Nadda, zero, zilch! A lost coin is worth nothing.

These two parables are all about God who seeks and saves that which was lost. There is nothing in these parables about earning or merit. They contain not so much as a hint about a reward granted for those who have earned it. There is only the gracious determination of the shepherd and the woman to seek and to find that which is lost.

What does that mean Jesus is saying about repentance? What light does this shed on confession, contrition, absolution? Confession then is not an admission of a mistake, which we have finally recognized and corrected.

Confession is the admission that we are dead in our sins. We have no power in and of ourselves to change that condition. Nor, if we are dead, can we convince someone we are worth saving. As the dead, the only way we can have life is if someone performs spiritual CPR!

The shepherd seeks the sheep that is lost because it is lost. We are lost, dead in trespasses and sins, life is out of our hands. Our life is entirely the gift of the gracious giver, the Seeker of the Lost.

It also begins to be clear that the absolution is not God somehow understanding our weaknesses and making allowances for our errors. God takes our sins and disposes of them. God takes hold of us in our deadness and gives us a new life.

Jesus asks, “What man would…?” What man would seek a lost sheep and leave the others behind in the wilderness? What man would seek the lost coin and the spend the others to rejoice that he’d found it?

No man would, but God does!

God gave His Son to seek and to save that which was lost. It is God the Son who gives His life unto death and buries your sinfulness in His own tomb. He finds you walking lost in the valley of the shadow of death, and He puts you on His shoulders and brings you home to songs of rejoicing.

Christ brings you home and sets you down at His table and places a holy meal before you. It is a celebration meal, you celebrate Christ’s death in the eating of His body pierced for you, and in the drinking of His blood shed for you. You join all the hosts of heaven in rejoicing and celebrating, for in this meal, you who were lost are found.

Today dear friends is the celebration of your being found. You gather at the feast, and all heaven rejoices! Amen.