

Luke 15:1 - 10 The Good Shepherd & The Coins Found

1 Now all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

3 And He told them this parable, saying, 4 "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? 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 his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' 7 "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.

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? 9 "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!' 10 "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

I want to express a hearty thank you to you all for allowing me to be with my kids in Oregon over a couple of Sundays. It was my purpose to bring some cheer and encouragement and I did that partly by delivering some neat things that my mom left to my daughters.

A grandfather clock for Heather and a cedar chest full of treasures for Tina. I also went through Tina's house like a whirlwind fixing everything that was dripping or otherwise broken, including replacing her 1980's gas range with a new electric one. So, it was a busy trip away.

And now I'm anxious about fire wood, so that's the order of the next few weeks. But this morning we leave those concerns behind and we take some moments to think about what's really important after the concerns of this 5 minute life have passed and we enter into the reality of eternity.

Every human ever conceived in the likeness of God will exit this life into eternity in some fashion. As Daniel 12:2 states; *And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*

Eternal life in the joyous presence of our God and Saviour, or eternal punishment and shame and contempt await every person. Our culture scoffs at that idea. A sky God. A heaven. A hell.

The very idea of truths that are non-negotiable. The idea that a sky God has revealed truths that clearly state what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. A God who created all things and owns all things and who will judge all who rebel against Him. Our culture rejects all of that. In fact it's so removed from our current culture that it's a bit hard for us to imagine the scenario in verses 1 and 2 of our story this morning.

Two opposing groups of people in that culture. That part we can fixate on readily as that's exactly what we're experiencing in our nation. The have's and the have not's. The accepted group and the rejected group. Those who are in and those who are locked out. We get that.

But turning back the clock to Israel in 33 AD or thereabouts, the in group are the pharisee's. The righteous. The legalistic law keepers. The self righteous circumspect keepers of Moses system of laws who have added layer upon layer of traditions of the elders so complex that God's simple laws have been lost in the layers.

In that culture, these are the "in" kids. The elite's who are in control and who are able to lock out those who are outside of their clique. They abhor the quote - unquote "sinners". They are ceremonially clean and they reject anyone who is less "clean". They don't want to be near "those people", also in quotes.

Luke defines our two opposing groups very well for us.

1 Now all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. 2 And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Luke uses dual definitions in both cases to define the opposing groups. Tax gatherers and sinners defines the "out" group. Tax gatherers is a general reference to anyone who has sold out to Rome. Get in bed with Rome and life will be easier.

To the pure, this is a moral and literal sell-out. In order to gain some ease and comfort and power in this world you've left the God of Israel and the children of Israel behind and joined forces with the evil occupiers. You've sold your soul to the devil in order to fill your belly. Despicable vile hated filthy sell-outs. Publicans. Publicans and sinners go together in the Bible.

The other descriptor is a step above the political sell-outs. Sinners. The folks who have sold their soul to Rome to fill their bellies are obviously sinners with no hope at all. But these others who are just called sinners are not necessarily turning their back on Israel, they have simply given up the fight against sin and have given themselves over to lifestyles that ignore God's laws.

Prostitutes. Adulterers. Fornicators. Thieves. Liars. Coveters. Murderers. Ordinary sinners. Luke is inclusive in his two defining words of anyone who the righteous would not want to rub up against by accident in a crowd. Soiled, unrighteous people. The defiled. The outcasts.

Luke also divides the righteous into two defined groups. The scribes are the devout lawyers who study God's laws continually. They are the ones who define what it is that the pharisee's must comply with in order to attain righteousness.

So those are our two defined opposing groups and the pharisee's have a problem with Jesus. He's way too friendly with the filth. Jesus has become guilty by association. He hangs with publicans and sinners. He's friendly

with the riff raff. Dirty by association. Receiving the unclean makes Him unclean to these who are righteous in their own eyes.

Messiah wouldn't be friends with those people. He's coming to burn them up with fire. Therefore, Jesus is NOT messiah, He's no better than the filth He's associating with. Jesus stands alone outside of both groups. He is sinless and holy. Yet He extends God's gracious love to ordinary sinners and righteous sinners. It isn't the season to burn up the chaff. It is the season of grace.

The gorilla in the room is that the pharisee's are no better suited for heaven with all of their law keeping and self righteousness than the prostitutes and sinners. In God's economy, they are all equally defiled and will not be welcomed into His Holy Kingdom.

It's fascinating that Jesus doesn't make that clear. In His stories, including the prodigal son that we'll consider next week, Jesus just sort of includes the self righteous as inclusive. Why does He do that?

In the prodigal son story, the righteous son is told, you've always had me and everything that is mine is yours. In our two parables, the 99 sheep in the safety of the fold, and the 9 coins that aren't lost are the equivalents of these pharisees and scribes.

But 20 centuries later with our 20-20 hindsight, we know that these self righteous pharisees are on the wide road to hell. Why doesn't Jesus let them know they are in serious peril in these parables?

There are a couple of reasons. Read Matthew 23. He does get around to telling them in very plain language exactly that. They are sons of hell. He minces no words. In John 8 He tells them their father is Satan. They are indeed sons of hell. But He doesn't stress that here. This is fascinating.

The other reason is that Jesus doesn't waste time re-teaching what they should have already been well aware of because it is taught clearly in their prophets.

But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. Isaiah 64:6

They were accountable to know the truths revealed by their own prophets. Jesus is like; I'll play this game with you. You think you're righteous? You're accountable to Isaiah, but we'll go with your false view. You want to ignore Isaiah's clear teaching, fine, we'll go with it.

Plus He had already told them many times; "*But go and learn what this means: 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*" Mt. 9:13

They had already been down that road. Jesus tells them plainly, God wants your heart, not your phony self righteousness. It fell on dead ears.

I find it fascinating that Jesus let's them remain locked down in their false religion of self righteousness. In fact, that's exactly the point of His two parables here, and the third that we'll look at next week.

Heaven rejoices over repentant sinners, not over un-repentant self righteous people who refuse to see their own inner sinful selves as the repugnant to God people that they truly are.

Self righteous people fail to understand the distance between this world's fallen attempts at self righteousness by law keeping and God's perfect sinless holiness. They are convinced that God would be pleased to have someone like them in His presence.

But Isaiah's language is actually pretty harsh. When Isaiah says filthy rags, our righteousness is filthy rags, the term is how you would describe a white rag that has been dipped in raw sewage. Our best righteousness is like cloth soiled by sewage to God.

One of my favorite illustrations is from Zechariah chapter 3. When Israel had

returned from captivity God showed the prophet Zechariah a vision of Joshua, the high priest. One of the most Godly men in Israel. A man with a good heart who loved God and was struggling to see the nation and the love of God restored. A righteous man in this world's eyes.

Here's the vision of Joshua standing in the presence of God; Zechariah 3:
1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. 2 And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?" 3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. 4 And he spoke and said to those who were standing before him saying, "Remove the filthy garments from him." Again he said to him, "See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes."

The hebrew word filth, or filthy; his garments were filthy, the root word is tso and it means literally "to issue" Are you starting to get the jist. We're talking about human excrement here.

All of the righteousness of the righteous is "issue" to God. Even the best man stands before God foul and soiled in his own righteousness. The pharisee's did not believe that. It was in their writings and they chose to believe they would be welcomed into God's presence.

All of us are like filthy rags to God. At least the publicans and sinners know they're filthy. That's actually a lot closer to a remedy than the righteous folks. So Jesus is investing in the reachable group, and the "righteous" pharisees and scribes reject Him.

Let's look at the parables one at a time and draw some conclusions.

3 And He told them this parable, saying, 4 "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?"

I think God created sheep not only as a blessing for us because of all of the good that is derived from them, food, clothing, but also as a picture for us to understand ourselves from heaven's point of view.

Sheep are stupid and they're helpless. Left to themselves, they cannot survive. They have no instincts about direction. They get busy eating and they wander away, and then they're helpless. They can't get back to the other sheep, and they have no defenses against predators.

What a picture of fallen humans who have wandered away from their creator. We wander about helpless in this world. Totally lost and defenseless.

Have you noticed lately when you open a new blank page on your computer there are endless stories about everything we're learning. Pages and pages of pocketlearns that were tailor made for me! Yours would be different, tailored for you. So much to learn! Everything from Amy Coney Barrett to rug stains to global warming to pandemic damage to How Hatred came to dominate American politics to which is the best mattress. And that was just a single day's worth. They'll be different tomorrow.

Did somebody say; "*ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*"? 2Tim. 3:7 Yes, Paul did in his letter to Timothy as he was describing the last days and the hopelessness of lost men.

Sheep don't bother to try to learn. We have billions of pages of learning, an explosion of everything we're learning, and we're still just as lost as this poor stupid sheep that has wandered off into some bramble or tipped himself upside down and cannot get back on his feet. It's a picture of fallen man. Hopelessly stupid and lost, separated from his Creator.

And Jesus says *What man of you*. . . Have we heard that before? Yes, often, and it's His lead in to show them that they are hypocrites. You have a double standard. You rescue sheep because they are valuable. You don't rescue lost people because even though they are made in God's image, to you they have zero value. Double standard.

But that isn't God's standard. God goes looking for lost sinners. God loves the cast off refuse of this world.

5 *“And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.*

We need to notice in this parable what part each person plays in the saving of lost sheep. Sheep do nothing. Nothing. They're just stupid and helpless and lost. God, who is represented by the Good Shepherd, does everything. Everything. We do nothing but get ourselves hopelessly lost. We have no part in our rescue. None.

That's important because the pharisee's Jesus is speaking to are all about self rescue. Self attained righteousness. They're busy rescuing themselves. Sort of like the internet. 1000's of pages of self rescue tid bits. We're still as lost as ever, and so likewise are these pharisee's. God is who rescues. No one else can do it.

The Good Shepherd initiates the search. The Good Shepherd finds the lost sheep. And the Good Shepherd lays it across His shoulders and goes home rejoicing in having found that whom He values greatly.

6 *“And 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!’*

There is joy in re-gaining something of value that was lost. When the stock market is down you play the sad music. When it's up you play the happy music. Even NPR gets that much right. Gaining something valuable makes us happy. And so also heaven rejoices over gaining lost sinners.

How much joy is there when a child who is created in the Father's image that had been lost, actually captured might be a better word, captured by sin and Satan in a fallen hopelessly lost world, and that child is found and rescued by God of very God. Rescued from the evil captor. That is cause for unspeakable joy because image bearers have unspeakable value.

Nobody's having a party in heaven over the pharisee's who think they aren't lost. There's no celebration in heaven over those guys.

7 "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.

In verses 5, 6, and 7 we have three different versions of the same root word. Kara is the word for joy. It is also the word for grace.

If I asked all of you to think about all of God's attributes and we had a blackboard up here and we wrote them down as people thought of them, we would get a pretty good list. Oniscience. Omnipresence. Omnipotence. Immutable. Eternal. Just. Righteous. Holy. Love. We could get most of them sorted out from memory and books we've read.

But the one we don't think of as we should is joy. Our God is happy. And He is also the source of all real deep seated joy and happiness and contentment.

In vss 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10 we have the same word root over and over describing God's joy. Heavens joy. The angels joy. And my personal favorite is the one in vs 6 and 9 that is the compound version. Soong chairo. The root soong is how we get our word sync, as in synchronise.

You see God delights in sharing His delight. Like the shepherd who gathers his friends and the lady who gathers all her other neighbor ladies and friends. Rejoicing is better when there is synchronizing. God shares His joy with us and we share it with anyone we can get to listen. God's joy just spills over onto anyone who is near by.

7 "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.

It turns out that the publicans and sinners are far more easy to reach than the righteous pharisee's. Righteous people don't need a Saviour. They don't need any saving. It's sort of hopeless in a sad way.

Jesus was a master of sarcasm. When He says "*who need no repentance*" He is speaking totally tongue-in-cheek. Question; How many in Adam's race have sinned? Answer; All When Jesus says "*who need no repentance*" He's actually mocking their self assured self righteousness.

If you've ever watched any video's of Ray Comfort giving the gospel cold turkey he just walks up and begins a conversation and immediately launches into the 10 commandments. Ever told a lie? Ever lusted after a person? Ever stole anything. Ever wished for someone's death? OK then. It's taken about 90 seconds to ascertain that you're a lying cheating lustful adulterer and thief. If God is righteous, should He allow someone like you into His heaven?

Righteous people do not need a Saviour. Sinners do. Heaven rejoices over sinners who repent, not over those who are convinced their righteousness is sufficient. Every time God finds a sinner who repents and is saved, value is subtracted from Satan's kingdom and added to God's kingdom. Image bearers have value. Especially redeemed ones. Great joy comes when God rescues people out of Satan's grasp.

The second story is for the women's libbers. He keeps saying, what man among you. What about us women?? Equal value, equal time. 8 "*Or what woman,*

It's also telling that from a pharisaical perspective, both groups that Jesus uses in His story's are of no value to pharisee's and scribes. Women and shepherds are both second class citizens in their world.

Shepherds are low class people because their work environment is a lowly place in the social structure, and their job requires them to not be able to be ceremonially clean. Most shepherds don't get to enjoy the temple or the synagogue because they're ceremonially unclean. That makes them sort of

outcasts.

And women are just, well, women. In Satan's world they have always been downtrodden and second class citizens. I want to repeat that. In Satan's kingdom, Satan's realm, this lost fallen sinful world, women are mistreated second class citizens.

This book elevates women because it takes them to a level fully equally valuable with men in God's eyes. Women have different jobs to accomplish than men, but in God's kingdom, God's authority to reign, women are of full equal value to God as men are. And so are children. And babies. And the unborn. We are all image bearers and every one, of infinite value to God who created us for His glory.

So anyways, to the consternation of the *righteous* men, the stories are about shepherds and women. I think Jesus liked to poke these guys with a stick a little bit. He uses shepherds and women to make His point perfectly. Lost sinners, value and joy. People of no value to pharisee's are the subjects of God's searching for them because He values them. Righteous people. Not so much.

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?”*

The pharisees are all standing around going, who is this woman with 10 coins and how can I get them away from her. Why hasn't she put them into the treasury. They've got no good use for the woman but they would like to get their hands on those coins.

The greek word for the coins indicates these are of great value. Perhaps her inheritance and security. Her retirement account. In any case, she had 10, now she only counts 9. One coin is lost.

Those houses with hard pan dirt floors and no electric lights and few if any windows would be dark inside, so she lights a lamp and the search is on.

Every corner and crevice is swept and studied until she finds THAT coin.

And the outcome is identical to the first parable of the lost sheep.

9 “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!’

Joy and rejoicing have this inherent quality that celebrating alone doesn't really get the job done. Rejoicing alone doesn't work. We are made to rejoice with others. There is synergy in having something to rejoice about. With 2 people it's 3 times as good. With 5 people it's 10 times as good.

That's especially true when we're rejoicing over God's glory. When God saves people we want to find an entire multitude and raise the rooftops. The shepherd finds all of his homies who will associate with him and they celebrate together. The woman finds all of her other ladies and they have a hootenany.

Notice who's missing in this deal. The righteous. The folks who need no repentance won't be found at the party. That's why Jesus choices of subjects in His story are so brilliant. No self respecting pharisee can see himself at either of these celebrations. Jesus did that on purpose.

The righteous who need no repentance are not invited to the celebration. In fact next week we'll see that they are rather indignant that anyone's celebrating anything except all of their righteousness.

10 “In the same way, The moral to this story, the lesson, is exactly the same as the previous parable. Identical.

I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

The original complaint was that Jesus was associating with publicans and sinners. Riff raff and outcasts. *“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”* Luke 19:10

Sinners, who know they are guilty, are much closer to the Kingdom of God than all of the righteous folks who think they're just fine. In both stories, the Good Shepherd, and the woman are God who seeks the value He has lost.

We are of such value to Him that He sent His only Son to die in our place so that He could purchase us back from this evil lost world.

Free will is one of the most complicated topics to consider in the entire Bible. The pathway to be restored to God is wide open. Bought and paid for. Filth has a remedy. We can be clothed in Christ's righteousness, white and clean. But free will is the thing that keeps us away. Free will keeps us separated from God.

That sheep that wandered off doesn't understand the peril it's in. It's just stupidly chomping on grass. It doesn't know it's lost. It doesn't realize there are predators about to eat it. It has no desire to be rescued. In fact when the Good Shepherd comes that sheep is annoyed at the interruption of it's grass it was chewing on.

I'm fine where I'm at. Leave me alone. I was really enjoying that bunch of grass. The free will to remain in sin and think you're just fine is the single most difficult problem of restoring any lost sinner to God.

I could knock on every door in this town and no one has any sense of danger or peril. We're all good citizens. Why would God have any beef with us? We're fine. Here it is, October and I haven't killed anyone at all this year. I live and let live, and in fact the only thing annoying me is you telling me I'm not good enough for God. Please leave.

Did you notice in the parables, when the shepherd rescues the lost sheep, He doesn't just go back to the 99 and toss it in. When the woman finds the lost coin she doesn't just toss it back in with the other coins.

No the item that was restored is celebrated. There is joy. Infectious joy that is

shared with all the like friends and neighbors and relatives over this thing of great value that has been restored. The value of the item is proved in the celebration of it's restoration.

Jesus said the fields are ripe and the harvest is great. Pray for the Lord of the harvest to send workers into the harvest. The churches that are celebrating and joyous are the ones who are enjoying the joy of the harvest. Let's pray for those things. Valuable souls restored so that we can rejoice with the Lord of the harvest over His gain, which is also ours. Pray for a spiritual awakening in our town. And pray for a harvest of souls for God's glory.