

Rejoice in the Lost and Found

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 15. We'll be looking at the whole chapter. (Why are you laughing?)

It was September 3, 1857, when the *SS Central America* left the Panamanian port of Colón for New York. Onboard were 477 passengers, 101 crewmen, and 15 tons of gold that was mined by the miners of the California gold rush. On September 9, the *SS Central America* encountered a Class 2 hurricane off the coast of the Carolinas. By September 11, the sails were shredded, the boiler room was flooded, and the ship was floundering at sea in 105 mph winds. The next morning, two ships attempted to rescue the *Central America*. The first was the *Marine*, and it succeeded in rescuing 153 people, mostly women and children, but the seas were so fierce that they couldn't transfer people by boat anymore, and the rescue attempt had to be halted. All day the ship floundered, and at about 8 p.m., the *SS Central America* sank to the bottom of the ocean, taking most of her passengers, all of her crew, and the captain with her. A Norwegian ship, the *Ellen*, managed to rescue fifty more people from the water. A week later, three more people were rescued from one of the *Central America's* lifeboats.

The sea had claimed many souls and all of that gold. There [the ship] lay, on the bottom of the ocean, free for the picking, for 130 years. Nobody knew where it was, until 1987, when the Columbus-America Discovery Group located the lost gold. Among the treasure were tons of freshly minted

coins, gold bars, and ingots, strewn on the floor of the ocean, still in perfect condition. [Since they were made out of] gold, they didn't corrode or get crusty. One of the gold bars was named "Eureka," [and] weigh[ed] 933 ounces—80 pounds of pure gold that sold for \$8 million.

[You're probably] think[ing], "Man, I wouldn't mind a bar like that!" But the question is: When [you] think about a story like this, does [y]our mind gravitate toward the gold or the people? Which is more valuable to you? [Are] the people or the gold [more valuable]? When you hear a story like this, you may say to yourself, "Those people are dead. They're gone. I don't know any of them. They're gone [and] the gold remains, so why not get the gold?" What if the *Marine* or the *Ellen* came to you and you were on board the *SS Central America* and the captain [of one of those ships] shouted over, and said, "I can rescue you and your wife, or you and the gold," or, "I can rescue you and your children, or you and the gold," or, "I can rescue you and all of these other passengers, these strangers that you don't know who are standing by watching, listening to see how you're going to reply, or the gold"? Which one would you choose? [Would you choose] the people or the gold?

The fact is, all of those people who went down with the *Central America* are still alive. Their souls are still alive. They all continue to exist consciously in either heaven or hell. For [a little more than] 150 years, they have been absent from their bodies, but their souls, their spirits, will never die. The world looks at them as dead and gone, and it values the gold more than [it does] them. Yet in the end, the gold is going to perish. The earth and its works will be burned up [see 2 Peter 3:10]. [Do] you know what's going to remain? The souls of men, women, and children [are going to remain], and they're all going to be in one of two places: heaven or hell.

The greatest treasure on earth [is] the souls of men. People's souls are the great treasure—not diamonds, not rubies, not emeralds, not gold, but people. People are priceless because they are created in the image of God, they have eternal souls, [and] Christ died for them, paid the ultimate price

for them. God, being [incarnated as] a man, gave Himself up on the cross for them, which elevates their value far beyond all calculation.

Satan, of course, does not value people. He has been a murderer from the beginning [see John 8:44]. He would just as soon we pitch people and keep the stuff. We have a world today where every year 42 million babies are slaughtered—most [of them] because the people [who made them] don't want them and they [consider the babies] an inconvenience. That's 115,000 [babies] per day. We have people today who would kill a person to get a drug fix, for a handful of cash, [or] because somebody made them angry. Our first impulse may be to think, "Oh, there [are] a lot of wicked people in the world. That is so terrible. That is so gruesome. That is so wrong." But what would you say to somebody who has what those people need to be rescued, [a person who] has the solution, has the cure for their eternal souls, and yet won't give it to them? What do you say to those people?

Jesus, speaking of the end times in Matthew 24:12, [said]: "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold." And you know what? These are those times. And you know what? Love *has* grown cold. People are greedy, selfish, [and] more concerned about their stuff, their comfort, their momentary pleasures than they are with the souls of men. [They are essentially saying], "I'll take the gold, let my wife sink. I'll take the gold, let my children perish. I'll take the gold, let all these other strangers die. I want the gold." I'm afraid we have been deceived by the world into loving the world more than [we love] our fellow man.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the famous German writer and philosopher, had it right when he said, "We are shaped and fashioned by what we love." What is shaping, molding, fashioning you into what you are? Is it your love for your fellow man, or is it the world?

John tells us in 1 John 2:15–17:

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that

is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.

Charles Dickens, in *A Christmas Carol*, [wrote a] scene [in which] Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his late business partner, Jacob Marley. Marley's ghost is despairing and is there to warn Scrooge of the terrible fate that awaits him if he does not repent. [Marley] is dragging a huge chain made of steel cash boxes, padlocks, purses, and ledgers—the very things that Marley valued in life more than anything else, those things that molded him and made him into what he became. It is those things that he is forced to drag around with him in death. Marley confesses: “I wear the chain I forged in life. . . . I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it.” Marley's ghost then tells Scrooge about the weight and length of the strong coil that [Scrooge] bears. He says, “It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have labored on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!” It makes me wonder how many professing Christians are forging their own ponderous chains.

Scrooge, by this time, is trembling with fear. He's trying to shake off the guilt brought upon him by Marley's apparition. He's nervous, and so he tries to make light of the situation. He says, “But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.” This touches a painful nerve in Marley's ghost, who cries out in anguish: “Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”¹ I am quite certain that many professing Christians have their own ponderous chains [to which] they are adding link-by-link because they refuse to make mankind their business.

¹Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, public domain. Text available at: <http://www.charlesdickens.ca/carol/stave1.htm>

Oh, they come to church, sing the songs, call themselves Christians around other Christians, but that's all. That is not making mankind your business.

Of course, the greatest good we can do anyone is to share the gospel with him, to pray for him, and to see him come to salvation in Christ. That is the great welfare that we can offer mankind. We have a cure for them. Jesus said in Matthew 16:26: "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" People need the Lord, and we have what they need. You can't wait for the world to go share the gospel with them. Think about it. If we just sit here in our little holy huddle, sing our hymns, encourage one another, and use Christian jargon—"Praise the Lord! God is good"—and think, "Well, the world can evangelize itself," it's never going to happen. It will never happen because all those in the world are blind [and] lost [see Luke 19:10]. They themselves need [to be] found, and so it's up to those who have been found to go seek out those who are lost.

This is what Jesus is going to teach us this morning in Luke 15. He is still ministering in Perea, east of the Jordan. He is headed toward Jerusalem to die on the cross. He knows this. He knows His time is short, and so He's really stepping up His evangelistic efforts. As a matter of fact, when you look at the text, from here on out, from [Luke] 15 to 19, what you're going to see is Jesus reaching out to all of the down-and-outers, all the losers of society. They are the main characters from here through [Luke] 19. It's like Luke accumulates all of Jesus' efforts to deal with the social outcasts because the religious establishment wouldn't have Him. So, now, He's turning to the riffraff.

We're going to look at Luke 15—all of it, believe it or not. Miracles sometimes still happen. All I'm going to do is strike at the main theme of the whole passage and its two main points. There is a lot here, and I'm going to be going by some really great stuff. However, for the next four weeks we're going to come back [to Luke 15] and look [at it] some more. But I want to give you the big bite here, the whole picture, because it's going to drop on you like an eighty-pound brick of gold. It's crushing, and

it's good. It will soften your heart, and it will shock you. It is so forceful that to break it up into pieces is a shame, so I'm not going to. I'm going to hit you with the whole thing, and then I'm going to break it up into pieces [in the coming weeks].

Look at Luke 15:1[–3]: “Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ So He told them this parable.” Here is the situation that gives rise to all three parables in the rest of Luke 15. The most despised people in Jewish society were tax collectors. They were despised because they were traitors, they sold out their own people to extort money from them. They had Rome behind them so they could rob their own fellow countrymen. They were despised. They were hated.

Here, [in Luke 15], tax collectors and sinners—the prostitutes, the people who were openly rebellious to the Law of Moses—are coming to Jesus. Jesus' miracles and teaching have little impact on the self-righteous religious leaders, but [they] draw in those who knew they were sinners because Jesus came to seek and save sinners [see Luke 19:10]. They came like bugs to the light to get their sins forgiven, to get saved. Meanwhile, we read here in [Luke 15:]2 that the Pharisees and scribes are grumbling. The Greek [word] describes [a] kind of murmuring. [It's like] when you're talking to somebody, and you hear somebody [else] in the background [muttering]. [The Pharisees and scribes were saying things like], “Look at who's coming to Him. He's got some people [coming to him]—look they're tax gatherers. That woman's a prostitute! He's *eating* with them! Look at that?” [There was] that kind of talk.

The rabbis had a saying, “Let not a man associate with the wicked, not even to bring him the Law.” The rabbis saw themselves as righteous, and when there was a wicked person, somebody openly rebellious, [they] wouldn't even give [that person] the Law of God. [The rabbis thought], “Don't even teach them the truth. Just let them perish because they're sinners and we're not. We've done what is right, and they haven't. Because

they have abused the grace of God, let them perish. Let them go to hell.” That’s exactly what’s going on here with these scribes and Pharisees. They saw themselves as righteous. In fact, that’s exactly what we read in Luke 18:9, where Luke says [that] they “trusted in themselves that they were righteous.” It also reveals that they had no love for their fellow man. They had no joy in knowing that sinners were coming to repentance and salvation. They could [not] care less. They were just mad that [those sinful people] might end up in the kingdom of God with *them* when they have done what’s right and [those people have] done what’s wrong.

Each parable [in Luke 15] teaches the same basic lesson. The last parable teaches us far more, so we’re going to spend several weeks looking at [it] in the weeks to come. I am going to get at the main two points [of Luke 15 in this sermon. To do so], I am going to approach the text thematically rather than sequentially. We’re going to look at all the pieces of each parable that relate to one point, and [then] all the pieces of those parables that relate to the other point.

The first point is this: We need to seek lost souls. Look at [Luke 15:]4. Jesus, in response to the grumbling of the scribes and Pharisees, says: “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?” Shepherds live with their sheep. Each sheep was known and recognized by the shepherd. I don’t know if you’ve been around sheep, [but] I grew up in the mountains, so I’ve been trying to get to my favorite fishing hole and had to wait until sheep and [more] sheep went by [as the shepherd herded] them across the road. When I read this, it makes me wonder how a shepherd even recognize[s] that one [sheep] is gone. How do you even count a moving mass of fuzzballs? But you know what? If you live with your sheep all day, every day, you get to know your sheep. It’s like Jesus said in John 10:27: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” When the shepherd knows his sheep, and he sees that one of them is gone, it is a problem because those sheep are valuable to him. It’s not just because they give him wool, or because leg of

lamb is tasty to eat. They're like pets—he has a relationship with each of his sheep.

You [might] hear somebody say, “Oh, man, I had to take my dog, or my cat, to the vet, and it cost \$3,000 to get [it] fixed.”

If you don't have a dog or a cat, and you're not an animal lover, you [might think], “What? Man, why didn't you just put [it] out of [its] misery and just bury [it] in the garden? You spent \$3,000 on a dog or cat? You can get them at the pound for free! I mean, they're less than a dime a dozen.” But you know what? When you have raised that dog, trained that dog, played with that dog or that cat (you don't train cats, but you *try* to train cats), you [establish] a relationship with your animal. You like your animal. So, when the animal gets sick, then \$3,000, though painful, is reasonable. Why? [It is] because the animal is valuable to you because you have invested all of that time, all of [those] resources, all of that energy into it and have a relationship with it. So it is with the shepherd here. The shepherd loses one of his sheep, and so he leaves the ninety-nine and goes looking for it so he can bring it back.

Of course, Jesus represents the shepherd. The sheep represent sinners, not believers as is sometimes the case. If Jesus were to shun sinners, He would be seeking to save His own reputation, and save face before the religious leaders. But He's not there to save Himself. He's there to save sinners, to seek and save that which is lost. Look at [Luke 15:]8, where we encounter the beginning of the second parable: “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?” Unlike sheep, coins don't lose themselves. Sheep wander off by themselves, [but] coins are lost by neglect. Jesus, here, is stressing the need to seek what is valuable and lost. Both sheep and coins are valuable.

The woman, obviously, is poor. She lives in a house with a dirt floor. The silver coin is a drachma, an entire day's wages, and if you're really poor, that's a lot of money. [The] houses [of the poor] at that time didn't usually have windows—the bigger ones did, but little houses didn't. [The

houses of the poor] were basically just a dark box with a door on it. The woman has dropped her coin. It has hit the dirt, the dust on the floor, and it has disappeared. Now she can't find it. So, she lights a lamp, gets out her broom, and she carefully sweeps the floor until she finds her coin. When she does [find it], she is excited, and she calls all of her women friends in because she has found it. (We'll see that in a minute.) But the parallels here are pretty close, aren't they? You've got something that's valuable, something that's lost, and something that's sought after.

For the last parable, look at [Luke 15:]11[-12]: "And He said, 'A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.''" The younger of the two sons is greedy. He's your typical young man who wants to go out and do what he wants to do. He doesn't want his dad telling him what to do. He doesn't want to be living at home anymore. He doesn't want to be at home. He doesn't want to be under the thumb of his father. So, he says, "I want my inheritance now." We can't even go into all the details, but [what he did was] so bad, [it was] such a huge insult to the father.

Look at the middle of [Luke 15:]12[-13]: "So he divided his wealth between them. And 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." The younger son, with cash in hand, says, "I'm outta here, Dad."

"Well, where are you going, son?"

[He says], "I don't know, but I'm outta here," and he takes off. He takes off to squander on sinful, indulgent things what his father has worked a lifetime to accumulate. It is at this point [that] the son is lost. His father doesn't even know where he is. He's in a different country. He has insulted his father, shamed his father, has departed from tradition, has disobeyed the laws of Moses, has disobeyed the traditions of the Jews, has abused his father's grace, and has jumped into sin headlong. He is lost.

Look at [Luke 15:]14[-16]:

Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.

The young man begins to suffer the consequences of his greed, of his pride, [and] of his arrogance. When he had cash, and he was spending it, he probably became more of a jerk than ever. “Yeah, I’m Mr. Big Bucks. I buy this. I buy that. Look at my new this. I’ll pay this woman to love me.” He thinks he’s hot stuff. He is sucking up all the booze, women, and carnality he can stuff in his body. Then what happens? It all comes to an end. He runs out of money, and a famine just so happens to come upon the land at the same time. The economy is extremely tight. He has to get a job, and [he ends up] feeding pigs. He’s so hungry [that] he’s starving even to eat the pig slop.

Jesus says, “No one was giving anything to him.” Why? [It is] because he was a loser. He became more of a loser as soon as he got what he wanted. He didn’t have any friends. The only friends he had when he had money were freeloaders who put up with his arrogance and pride so they could leech off his money. Now [that] his money is gone, they have abandoned him, and he is alone. Lost as he can be, living in a foreign country, penniless, friendless, defiled by unclean pigs, the young man is at the bottom. But then, by the grace of God, [he] snaps out of it. He snaps out of his proud, self-destructive attitude, and his mind runs home to his father. He thinks, “My father really loves me. These friends I’ve bought [don’t really love me], but my father is the one who really loves me.”

You may have somebody that you’re thinking of right now, some prodigal in your life. How do you reach [him] when [he’s] gone? You don’t even know where [he is], maybe. Well, you can always pray for [him]. If you know where [he is], you can e-mail [him], write [him] a letter, [or] give

[him] a phone call. Pray that [he] come[s] to [his] senses. In [the] three parables, the sheep, the coin, and the son are all lost. In [the] three parables, the sheep, the coin, and the son all have value. In [the] three parables, the sheep, the coin, and the son are looked for to be found.

The [first] lesson to learn here is this: Because all are born into this world lost; and all have value because they are created in the image of God, because they have eternal souls, and because Christ died for them; we need to, as Christians, value the souls of lost men. Sometimes you see these people, and you kind of despise them because they are entrenched in sin. Maybe you run into somebody who has tattoos everywhere, a weird haircut, eyebrow posts, and [a] tongue [piercing]. It looks like somebody shot [him] with ear piercings. I don't know. [He's just glistening with body owies, you know? [He] dress[es] weird, [in all] black or whatever. You [may] look at that [person], and think, "Man, what is wrong with that person?" You know what's wrong with that person? The same thing that was wrong with you before you came to Christ, before you were sought and found. If it were not for the grace of God, you'd be sitting there with [him].

Sometimes we can despise those people who are entrenched in sin who are mean—the mean boss, the mean neighbor, the mean coworker, the one with the foul mouth, the one who just plunges himself into sin and loves those things God hates. We want to shun them because, after all, look at them. They're disgusting. [But] you know what they are? They're just what all of us are apart from the grace of God. We have what they need. We need to take the words of Marley's ghost, the whole theme of what Dickens was trying to create through that story, and make the welfare of mankind our business.

You may be a banker, a housewife, [or] a truck driver. It doesn't matter what you are: mankind needs to be your business. Sure, [you do] your job so you can pay rent, buy food, and drive your car. That's fine, but your boss may need the Lord. Your coworker may need the Lord. Your money can be used for the ministry. Your life is the way it is so you can be in the world, not of the world [see John 17:14], and have an impact for Christ.

If you have been deceived and deluded by the world, and usually it happens by degrees, soon your love of your fellow man has grown cold. If you'd take the gold and let your wife, children, or neighbors perish, [you know that your love has grown cold]. You might be thinking, "Well, what can I do? I'm not praying for the lost. I don't share the gospel with anybody, or I rarely do, and usually [when I do] it's short and so pathetic they couldn't get saved even if they wanted to." Money, things, [and] pleasure [are] what excite you. [You may think], "I'm not excited about people coming to Christ." What is the solution? Well, it may be that *you* don't know Christ. It may be that *you* are lost and that is why you don't have the love of Christ within you.

Paul says in Romans 5:5: "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts," speaking of believers. If you are a believer, the love of God is poured out in your heart. It should be in there. Granted, we may reject it, we may ignore it, but it's in there. But if you don't know Christ, you don't have it in there, and you don't really care because you know what? You're living for the world. You may come to church, you may call yourself a Christian, but that doesn't make mankind your [business]. You may sing hymns, [but] that doesn't make mankind your business.

You may need to come to grips with your own lostness, and realize that Jesus died for you. God became a man [and] lived a perfect life so that you, through faith in Him, could receive the free gift of eternal life [see Romans 6:23]. Maybe you, right now, in your pew, need to come to grips with this, and realize, "I'm lost and I need [to be] found." Run to the Shepherd. He'll save you. He's the only one who can.

Let's just say for a moment that you have placed your faith in Christ, you do know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have been born again, you have the Holy Spirit within you, and the love of God has been poured out in your heart. But, by degrees, by deception, by distraction, by whatever, your love for [your] fellow man has grown cold. What do you need to do? First, spend some time this week with the Lord in prayer, and just tell Him. Say, "Lord, I don't love people like I should. I don't. I'm more

excited about getting a new car than seeing somebody come to Christ. I'm more excited about my job, or my hobby, than I am [about] sharing the gospel with somebody. I don't really have a love [for other people], and I need You to fix me because I can't fix myself." Just tell Him, and [if] you keep telling Him that, He'll answer a prayer like that. You know He will.

[The] second [lesson is]: Work at increasing the value of your fellow man in your heart. Get a love for people. Now, here's a little paradox because if you don't have a love for people, it's hard to get a love for people. Do you remember why the shepherd loves his sheep? [It is] because he spends time with them, because he invests energy and resources [in them, and he] has a relationship with them. [Do] you want to get a love for people? Then get out there, get outside of your comfort zone, for the Lord, for their souls, [and] tell them about Jesus. Yes, you may lose some friends. Yes, you may be scoffed at. Yes, you may be rejected. Yes, people may think you're weird, or you've lost your head and [are] one of those weird Jesus freaks, but hey, we're supposed to be. That's what we're called to be: like Christ, who offended multitudes.

When you invest in something, then you care about it more. If you don't have any money invested in the stock market, why look at all those little numbers in the newspaper? What do they mean [to you]? But if you put \$1,000 down on some little penny stock, all of a sudden that one little number means something to you, doesn't it? If you put \$10,000 down, every week you're looking to see how your money is doing. If you put \$1 million down, you're looking at the paper three times a day to make sure that your investment is being taken care of. Well, if you start sharing your faith, start praying for people, start strategizing about how to get people to Christ, do you know what's going to happen? You're going to care. You're going to care more and more, and the harder you try, the more you're going to care. Why? [It is] because you've had more invested.

There are times when God just plops somebody down into your lap, [someone] who says, "What must I do to be saved?" It's kind of a t-ball [hit]. God puts them on the little stick, He puts the gospel bat in your hand,

and then he says, “Swing!” You say, “Um, well, you need to believe in Jesus, who died on the cross for your sins, and was buried, and...”

The person says, “OK!” and [he] break[s] down, and say[s], “What do I need to do?”

You say, “I guess I’ll pray with you.” Then [he] come[s] to Christ. [Do] you know what? It’s exciting. It’s thrilling, and you’re going to have some joy over that, but [it will] not [be anything] like the joy [you would receive] if you’re out there day after day being rejected, day after day talking to people and talking to people [and finally someone comes to Christ]. [You’re out there, and] it seems like you’ve talked to a thousand people, and no one has come to Christ. You keep thinking, “Lord, where is this field that is white with harvest [see John 4:35]? I can’t even find a single grain of wheat!” Then, all of a sudden, you talk to somebody, and tears start coming down his face, and he say[s], “I need that,” and you [say], “Oh!” You’re going to talk to him, and you’re going to tell everybody you know, “I talked to this guy, and he came to Christ!” or “I talked to this woman, and she said that she accepted Christ!” You’re going to rejoice. Why? [It is] because you have invested much. But you know what? If you’re more concerned about your plasma TV, your car, and your hobby, when somebody comes to Christ, [you’ll merely think], “Oh, good.” You’ll be just like the scribes and Pharisees, [having] no love for your fellow man.

The second [point] we learn from this text, look at [Luke 15:]5, [is]: We need to rejoice when sinners are found. Here we see the response of the shepherd who finds the lost sheep: “When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 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!’ ” They’re [saying], “Great! We’re so glad you lost your sheep.” They might not even like sheep, but they’re glad for the guy. But if they’re fellow shepherds, they’d be more glad, [and they’d say], “Oh, yeah. I’m so glad you found that little, three-legged sheep. That one that we’ve been nurturing and giving so much attention to. That is *great!*”

Then comes the punch line of the parable: “I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents” [Luke 15:7]. Just stop there. Notice here [that] there is joy in heaven over sinners who are [saved]. Who is in heaven? Jesus, saints, believers who have died and gone to heaven, and angels [are in heaven]. There’s joy. They’re up there, [saying], “Oh, yeah! Someone came to Christ!” Here Jesus reveals the meaning of the parable. The lost sheep represents lost sinners. Finding the lost sheep represents the lost soul coming to repentance and faith in Christ. Jesus goes on to make a contrast between the rejoicing [in heaven] that occurs over the [one] lost sheep that is found and another group. Look at [Luke 15:]7 again, in the middle: “Than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” Now, who do you think these ninety-nine people are who need no repentance? Really, it should [say] ninety-nine people who *think* they need no repentance. Notice that in [Luke 15:]4, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to go fetch the one that’s lost. Who [are the ninety-nine]? [They are] the scribes and the Pharisees and anyone who doesn’t have love for his fellow man, anyone who values himself and the things of the world above his fellow man.

This fits with what Jesus said in Luke 14:24, where He tells the religious leaders, “You aren’t going to be in the kingdom of heaven eating dinner with Me.” If you were to go back to Luke 5:30–32, it’s right after Jesus calls Matthew [to follow Him]. Matthew [is] so excited [because] he has come to Christ. He was lost, he was a tax collector—[known as] Levi—and [now] he [is] found, and he is psyched. He’s just jazzed because he has this relationship with Jesus. He has his sins forgiven, and he’s going to tell all of his other wicked friends [about it]. So, he gets all the tax collectors and all the sinners together and has a big feast. What do we encounter? [Luke 5:]30[–32 says]:

The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?” And Jesus answered and said to them, “It is not

those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

That is, He has not come to call those who *think* they’re righteous, but those who know they’re sinners and need repentance. So, what happened was [that] Jesus comes to Israel, God’s chosen people, and the leaders there are rejecting Him and rejecting Him. So, what does He do? He goes to those who *know* they’re sinners, and He welcomes them and gives the gospel to them that they might be saved.

Look down at [Luke 15:]9, where we see the response of the woman who found her lost coin. We read: “When she has found it,” this lost coin, “she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!’ ” What’s interesting here is [that] it says in the Greek that she calls her women friends and her women neighbors. The other guy [in Luke 15:6] calls his male friends and neighbors, all his shepherd buddies, probably. Here, this woman calls all the women in the neighborhood, and [says], “Guess what? I lost one of my coins, and I started looking, I took the furniture out, I turned on my lamp, and I’ve been sweeping the floor for hours. I finally found it, and here it is!”

They [say], “Oh, great! That’s so wonderful!” because they’re probably poor, too—[it’s probably a] poor neighborhood—[and they understand what finding that coin means]. They rejoiced with her. This is only normal. Look at [Luke 15:]10: “In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Notice here [that] Jesus doesn’t say that specifically the angels rejoice but that there is joy before the angels, or in the presence of the angels. Somebody else is rejoicing before the angels. Who could that be? [It is] Jesus and all the saints who have gotten [to heaven] after death. This doesn’t mean the angels aren’t rejoicing, too. Of course they’re going to rejoice in the things that God does, but notice the emphasis is [that] there is joy among sinners who are saved

by grace when other sinners are saved by grace because they've been there, and they've had that happen to them.

I can just imagine what it's like in heaven. There are people coming to Christ all over the world [all the time]. There must be constant joy there [in heaven]. [Jesus] says there is rejoicing there, so as people come to Christ there must be a major celebration happening all the time. "Oh, another one! Oh, another one! Oh, another one!" You can't even say it fast enough [because there are so many coming to Christ]. It's [a] constant reason to praise Christ for what He has done as people from all over the world are coming to [Him].

This is a rebuke to all of us, to one degree or another, who have not valued our fellow man as much as we should have. We've all done it. I confess to you [that I have done this]. But sinners are not found unless saints pray for their salvation and preach the gospel to them. That's our responsibility.

Let's look down at [Luke 15:]17[-19] and see what happened to the prodigal son.

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.' "

This is the turning point in this son's life. It says "he came to his senses." In other words, he got a clue. He realized his folly, he realized he blew it, he realized he sinned against his father, [that] he was stupid the way he handled his inheritance, that he was just a mess up. This is called repentance. He had a change of mind about the way he was living, about his sinful lifestyle, [and saw] that it was wrong. Then he turned back to his father. Repentance is to have a change of mind away from sin and toward Christ.

Look at [Luke 15:]20[-21]:

So he got up and came to his father. 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. And 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.”

There are so many great things here it is going to take four weeks to unpack them, but I’m telling you, this is major[ly] good. First, notice the love of the father. The father has been looking for his son. He doesn’t even know where his son is. That means he has been standing in the front yard, looking, day after day after day. He doesn’t even know [in] what direction [he should look]. He’s just standing [there], scanning, scanning. He’s praying that his prodigal son is going to come home. He has invested a whole life and now he’s investing more, trying to pray his son back. Second, notice [that] the father is not bitter. He’s not unforgiving. He runs to embrace his son before his son even says a word. That’s pretty incredible [because] running, for an older man, was not kosher in those circles.

Notice, also, third: the son confesses his sin, his unworthiness for what he has done, and the father freely forgives him, is reconciled to him, which is apparent. Look at [Luke 15:]22[-24]:

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 celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.” And they began to celebrate.

Every sinner has great value to God. God is just waiting for them to come home, [to] come to Jesus the Shepherd, [to] be found. The Father has

open arms. He's waiting. As soon as you turn from your sin and you start pursuing Him, He [says], "I've got you." There is a loving embrace, there's kissing, and then there's grace—grace upon grace. "Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" [Ephesians 1:3]—an eternity of grace given to unworthy sinners. Though they have not done anything to deserve any grace, He not only saves them and forgives them, then He lavishes upon them, as Paul says, "the riches of His grace" [see Ephesians 1:7, 2:7]. It's amazing. [He gives] the best of all He has.

Look at [Luke 15:]25[–28]:

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 could 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.

Here we have the ungodly response of the older son. He's bitter, angry, unforgiving, and even though the younger son has now come back, has left his carnal lifestyle, [the older brother] has no joy in that. Do you know why? [It is] because he's angry over the inheritance that was lost. He loved the world more than [he loved] his brother. Since [the younger] brother squandered a chunk of the inheritance, [the older brother] hates him because he'd rather have the money than his brother's soul saved. He represents the scribes and Pharisees and all those who love themselves and the world more than the souls of men.

Look at the middle of [Luke 15:]28[–29]: "His father came out and began pleading with 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,' " he [mentions] a young goat instead of a calf, " a young goat so that I might celebrate

with my friends.’” Let me ask you this: Do you really think that older son *never* disobeyed? Do any of you have any kids who *never* disobey? What’s his problem? He is deluded about what? [He is deluded about] just how righteous he is. He’s blind to his own sin and his own rebellion. He is envious that this forgiven son has been welcomed and given grace upon grace. He wishes his father had not received his wayward brother back.

Look at [Luke 15:]30: “But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.” Notice he won’t even call him his brother, [but instead says], “this son of yours.” I’ve had people in counseling, couples who were not doing well, and the woman refers to her husband as “that man,” and the husband refers to his wife as “that woman.” [It’s] not “my wife,” or her first name, but “Yeah, well, that woman...” using the far demonstrative. That’s exactly what’s happening here. [The older brother] is so bitter and angry [that he says], “This son of yours has squandered your wealth, devoured it with prostitutes, and now what are you doing? You’re giving grace to him. You’re being kind to him. He’s done all that...” [The older son] doesn’t have a clue. The father isn’t rewarding his son for his rebellion; he’s just gracious.

Look at [Luke 15:]31[–32]:

And he said to him, “Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.”

[The older son was] consumed with selfishness, greed, love of the world, love of his own self, love of his own power, and an unforgiving heart. His father brings him up short, and says, “This brother of yours.”

And you know what? The combined force of these three parables is pretty weighty, isn’t it? [It weighs] more than fifteen tons of gold. [The parables] tell us that we need to seek those who are lost and perishing, and make the eternal welfare of mankind our business because we’re Christians,

we're followers of Christ. When a sinner comes to saving faith in Jesus, we need to rejoice big time because Christ does, the angels do, [and] the saints in heaven do, because [the sinner was] lost and then found. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. We thank You for these three parables, which teach us such a valuable lesson. Help us to love the souls of men more than anything this world has to offer. Make us long and ache to see people saved. As we invest in praying for them, as we invest in sharing the gospel, as we invest in trying to order our lives in such a way that they may see our good works and glorify You, may we hunger to see them saved. May we make the welfare of mankind our business so that we don't forge our own ponderous chains of selfishness, greed, and worldliness. Father, may we leave here today committed once again to seek You out and ask You for grace that You might help us become the men and women that we need to be so we can make an impact in this world for Christ. We have the truth, we have the Holy Spirit, we have the love of God poured out in our hearts, we know we have no excuse, but, Father, we still need more help. Help us, we pray, that we might be children—sons, daughters—who give You glory. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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