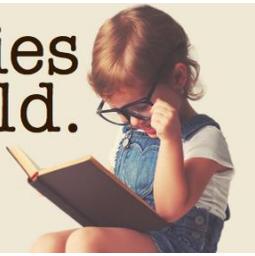


The stories Jesus told.



Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Luke 15:1-10 | July 30, 2017

Prepared by Paul White
paul@gspc.org | 562/493.2553 x116

I. Introduction to this Study

Our summer series *The Stories Jesus Told* continues as we look at two parables Jesus shared to teach his hearers about the character of God.

II. Connecting with One Another

Recall something you lost and were frustrated that you couldn't find. What did it feel like when you were looking, and if you found it, how did you react?

III. Study the Text

- a. Read Luke 15.1-10. What stands out to you in this initial reading? What questions do you have?
- b. The three stories of Luke 15 (we'll only look at two today) have been called "the gospel in the gospel" because they contain the heart of the good news Jesus came to announce. If this is so how would you describe that good news, using imagery from these two parables?
- c. Read verses 1-2 again. What problem do the Pharisees and teachers of the law have with the behavior of Jesus?
- d. Those who closely followed the law, such as the Pharisees, did so because they believed that the nearest you could get to heaven was in the Temple. And the Temple required strict purity from the priests. The closest *non*-priests could get was by maintaining similar strict purity in every aspect of life.

The Jewish belief was that the two halves of God's creation, heaven and earth, were meant to fit together and be in harmony with each other. The Pharisees and others believed that militant observation of the law and connection to the Temple would help to realize that harmony.

With this background in mind, why would these religious leaders find Jesus' participation in dinner parties with tax collectors and "sinners" so offensive?

- e. Context: tax collectors were Jews who worked for the Roman empire, collecting taxes from their countrymen—often charging more than was required and keeping the difference. They were considered traitors and were outcasts from Jewish society. The "sinners" were those whose lifestyles were less than pristine, certainly not up to the purity required by the Pharisees' strict interpretation of the law. Further, in that culture, sitting and eating with someone implied a certain amount of identification and welcome. By doing so Jesus was guilty by association in the eyes of the religious leaders.

Read Luke 5.27-31. What happens in this encounter between Jesus and Levi/Matthew? What does Jesus state as his mission?

- f. Back to Luke 15. In response to the muttering of the Pharisees and teachers of the law Jesus tells two stories, one about a lost sheep and one about a lost coin.

Sheep were of high value. At night, as they returned from pasture the shepherd would count them off, one by one, and would certainly notice if one was missing. A good shepherd would then leave the 99 safely in the care of others and go out and search for the lost sheep.

Both in the Old and New Testaments the shepherd served as an image of the religious leaders of the people, leaders who at times, like hired hands, did not serve the flock well. (See, if you have time, Jeremiah 3.15; 23.4; Ezekiel 34.1-16; John 10.1-5; 1 Peter 5.2-4.)

By sharing this story about a good shepherd with the religious leaders, what is Jesus saying about their care over the flock of God's people?

- g. Next Jesus tells a story of a woman with 10 silver drachmas, worth about a day's wage each—not a large sum, but one the woman is concerned about, nonetheless. She, like the shepherd, does all she can to find what has gone missing.

Both stories end in celebration with friends, and then a word of commentary from Jesus in verses 7 and 10. What does this commentary tell us about God's focus and desire?

- h. "Repentance" for Jesus is when people follow him and his way. What do you think "repentance" would mean for the religious leaders? (See below if you need help.) Was Jesus perhaps inviting the religious leaders (shepherds!) to repent?

(Repenting for the religious leaders would mean learning to view "tax collectors" and "sinners" in a different light. To see them as lost sheep or coins worthy of pursuit and—when found—a party!)

- i. What do these parables tell us about the character of God that Jesus came to proclaim?

IV. Reflect

- a. In what ways have you been "lost" in your life? How have you experienced God lovingly pursuing you?
- b. What role do the church and individual Christians have in seeking after "lost sheep" and "lost coins"? What is our responsibility? What is God's?
- c. What might Christians do today that would make people ask in surprise, "Why in the world are you doing *that?*" just as the Pharisees asked about Jesus' parties?
- d. Who are the "tax collectors" and "sinners" of our day? How would you feel about hosting or attending a dinner party that includes them?
- e. What does it mean to follow Jesus and his way? What does it *not* mean?

V. Pray (If you are in a group, perhaps take 5 minutes—or more—to individually and silently pray the steps below.)

- a. Settle yourself comfortably in your chair...focus for a few moments on your breathing...become aware of God's presence with you...
- b. ...find one characteristic of God to praise, perhaps relating to these parables...praise God...
- c. ...acknowledge your sins to God...in what ways are you not following the way of Jesus?...have you wandered off?...confess to the Lord and receive God's loving embrace...
- d. ... let the Spirit take your mind to those people and situations who need your prayers...are their lost sheep or coins for which you can pray?...lift them into the light of God's love...
- e. ...end by committing yourself to the way of Jesus, asking God to keep you and Good Shepherd in tune with the celebratory spirit of heaven...Amen.

(Since there's space, here's an old sheep-themed cartoon I drew...)

