



This Man (Joyfully!) Receives Sinners
Luke 15: 1 - 10
September 1, 2019

We are going to be in Luke Chapter 16 this morning. This morning's message is *This Man (Joyfully!) Receives Sinners*.

Several years back, my wife, Kristy, came home with a troubled spirit and a very sad look on her face. I picked up on that and asked her what was going on. She showed me the ring that I gave her one afternoon many years ago when I asked her to be my wife. It was a diamond engagement-wedding ring.

Somewhere and somehow, the prongs on that ring got loose enough for the diamond to fall out. Kristy did not know where that took place. So she spent that early afternoon backtracking every step that she had taken. If I remember correctly, Kristy even went to some supermarket parking lots and looked all over the ground, just looking and looking and looking for that diamond. However, it was not found.

Kristy shared this with me. I told her it was okay and that we would get another stone. But that did not help, because it would not be the one that was given to her when I asked her to be my wife. So, we took it to the Lord. We prayed and kept our eyes open because it had to show up somewhere.

Several weeks later on a Saturday afternoon, I was out washing the minivan. I was cleaning the interior of the van, dusting the dashboard and steering wheel. I was dusting and looking in places that I don't usually look, because I wanted to do a very thorough job.

Then I noticed this little object down in the crevice where the steering column is. I wondered what that was. I questioned what I hoped it might be! Could it be? I ran in the house and got a flashlight and I flashed into that little crevice, and, sure enough, I saw something that was sparkling.

I went back into the house to get a pair of tweezers. Then I told myself to be careful! I told myself I had to have the hand that is as steady as a surgeon as I put those tweezers into that crevice. I bumped the diamond, and the diamond got pushed further back in! It got lost somewhere in the steering column. No!!

But then I heard, click, click, click and out of nowhere, the diamond drop on the floorboard of the minivan. I was so excited!! I picked that thing up, being so very careful with it. I ran into the house and got the box with the ring and put the diamond as carefully as I could back into those prongs.

Kristy was in the kitchen preparing dinner and I knelt in front of her on one knee with a beaming look on my face. I said, “Kristy Michelle Saltzmann, will you do me the greatest privilege of being my wife?” I then presented to her the ring. Kristy easily gets misty-eyed, and she certainly did so then!

To conclude the story, I will let you know that it was a moment of rejoicing in the Saltzmann house, because something that was so valuable to us in more than one way, it was lost, and it was found.

This morning we open our Bibles to Luke Chapter 15, one of the greatest portions of Scripture. They are all great, but his is such a special passage. Sometimes it is referred to as *The Lord’s Lost and Found*, because this passage presents to us a series or a trilogy of parables. There are three of them.

Each one of the parables has the theme of something that was lost being found and being recovered. There are three parables, two of them short, and one of them longer and developed. There is the *Parable of the Lost Sheep*. Then there is *The Parable of the Lost Coin*. Finally, there is *The Parable of the Lost Son*. Some of us know this as *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*.

This morning we are going to look at the first two parables and the setting in which Jesus taught them. As we look at these parables, I pray that the teaching of the Messiah, of the Christ, enters into our ears and hearts and into our souls, making it so that we are more like Christ as we recognize His saving grace in our lives in finding us. And that we understand that Jesus also desires to convey that same heart in us that would rejoice in the lost being found.

As we look at these parables, understand that this theme of the lost being found is emphatic. This is at the heart and soul of this entire portion of Scripture—the lost being found. But there is something else that is even more emphatic here in this text, and it is the joy that is experienced when the lost comes home.

I think that these three parables even present to us a euphoric sense of joy that is experienced in Heaven when a sinner is found and comes to repentant humble faith and into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. This is the joy of the passage of Scripture and I pray that it truly becomes the heartbeat of each individual Christian here and in our church together as a community

Let’s take a look at what is here and see how it starts off with not everybody having such a heart for the ministry of recovery, but then we see the heart of Jesus shine through. Luke Chapter 15 and Verses 1 through 10:

¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

³So he told them this parable: ⁴“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? ⁵And when he has found it, he lays it on his

shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷Just 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. ⁸”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? ⁹And 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.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Wow, what a passage of Scripture! This is a portion of Scripture that is overflowing with the joy of the Lord—two parables depicting the gladness of heart that is experienced in Heaven over the recovery of lost sinners. I wonder if you would agree with me that joy is resounding from this portion of Scripture.

We see this and we notice that the joy is meant to be something that expands and spreads out. Did you notice that in both of the parables, the phrase *rejoice with me* was used? It is used twice in that text in Verse 6 and in Verse 9.

I think that through the parables Jesus was making an appeal to those muttering Pharisees. The point of these parables is *rejoice with me*. It is a word that went forth to them and this is a call that goes forth through the centuries all the way to 17909 Carpintero Avenue in Bellflower, California.

Can you hear Jesus crying out to you, *Rejoice with Me? Rejoice with Me in the recovery of notorious sinners even being saved and transformed*. We want to have this enter into our hearts and souls in order that our Christianity and our walk with Christ might be aflame with the desire to be used of the Lord to reach people for Christ.

Let me ask you this question and I want you to have this moment of quietness before the Lord. Christian and follower of Christ, is there anybody that you know in your life they are not Christians? They don’t have a living relationship with Christ. They have not been saved. They are not going to Heaven. They are in their sin. They are going to hell.

Do you know anybody in your life that does not worship Jesus? Get their pictures in your mind. Behold them there. In your mind’s eye, dream a little dream with me. Picture them gathered with Christians with hearts and hands lifted up singing praise from their heart to the King of kings and to the Lord of lords. Isn’t that quite a picture?

Picture them first thing in the morning with their cup of coffee or tea and the Bible is opened and they are communing with God through the Word, having their hearts refined through Scripture, having their lives changed through the Living Word which they are now submitted to. Picture that in your mind. Imagine them serving. Whatever spiritual gift they have been given, they are using it to their joy and to the blessing of other people. Just get that picture in your mind.

How often do you dream such dreams? I'm not sure I dream those dreams often enough. There is great joy to be found in people coming to a living relationship with Christ the King, the Redeemer, the Lord of lords. We must have a heart for it. Thinking through this passage of Scripture, Jesus is giving us a heart for the lost. It is an amazing picture to behold.

Let's start by noticing the setting here. What was going on when Jesus gave these parables? The setting is laid out in Verses 1 and 2. As I was reflecting on the historical context here, that moment in the ministry of Christ, there were two things in that setting that really gripped and registered with me.

Notice first of all, who it was that was drawing near to Jesus in Verse 1.

¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

The tax collectors and the sinners. That phrase is used throughout the Gospels and it is used to signal us to the presence of some of the most notorious, unjust people of the land. Those tax collectors were not righteous men. You had many, many unjust people in Israel. You had many people who were so licentious in their lifestyles, and they pulled other people into that lifestyle as well.

Sinners and tax collectors—people who were spreading the leaven of sin throughout the land. Then what were they doing? They were drawing near to hear Jesus. Their ears were opening. They were interested. To me, this is so mind blowing and interesting.

When we stop and think of the previous context, the things that had been happening all throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus had been preaching repentance; preaching the Kingdom of God. Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand. Confess your sins. Receive forgiveness, because things are culminating. Jesus was preaching the Kingdom.

Looking back at what just happened in the last chapter. Jesus was teaching hard-hitting truths about the cost of discipleship. He was putting forth the call to come into the Kingdom, but He was also teaching people what it was going to require.

In that last portion of Scripture that we studied; do you remember that Jesus was telling people that it was going to cost them some relationships. This is the essence of it. Jesus was telling people, *This is going to require some self-sacrificial devotion as you take up your cross and follow Me.*

Jesus was asserting, *This is going to require that you let go of that sense of lordship over all of your possessions. You need to renounce those things.* It is not that He was going to drain everybody's accounts, but those things were now in the hands of the Living God.

Jesus was teaching the Lordship that comes with discipleship. Jesus then finished off with that illustration of salt—salt is good! Amen! Salt is good. I even got a hat for my birthday that says, *Salt is good.* Somebody was listening. But Jesus was saying, We are distinct here. And if salt loses its saltiness, what is it good for?

Then what did Jesus say? How did he finish that passage? It says, *He who has ears to hear, let him hear*. Let's read that passage again and try not to look at the chapter and verse headings that have been added in for our ability to look things up.

Look at the very end of Chapter 14 in Verses 34 and 35:

³⁴“Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? ³⁸It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

Chapter 15 and Verse 1:

¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

Do you see the connection of words? Of all the people that you would have imagined being given ears to hear. Who was it that came near to hear Him? Some of the most notorious sinners of the land. They were not drawing near to protest Him. They were not coming to see a miracle. They were not coming to see what was coming next.

Rather, they were coming to hear Him. In the context of such deep teaching, this gives us encouragement. We need to have this steady sense of confidence in the power of God's unadulterated word to reach people that we might not even imagine reachable.

There are some churches and some Christians who are in the habit of watering things down and fluffing things up, perhaps to make it easier to swallow. But Jesus had been teaching hard-hitting truths, and these truths were reaching the hearts of those being drawn into salvation as these people perceived the substance of what was being said. It is a sight to behold.

We see this first of all. It is amazing to see the sinners and the tax collectors being drawn in to hear, but the second part of this that really got my attention was the response of the Pharisees to the fact that the sinners and the tax collectors were drawing close.

Look at what it says in Verse 2:

²And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

What was their response to the gathering in of people who were coming? It is one of our favorite Greek words for complaining and murmuring—*gongusmon*! Kind of like a gong. They were complaining, *Oh, great, what are these people doing here? What is Jesus doing talking with them?* The Pharisees were complaining about what was happening.

I wonder if there are any religious people who complain when they see certain people drawing close. What might this look like in our day and age? How about this: It is a church gathering

and here comes a group of young men, maybe in their adolescents. These guys are wearing pants that are sagging so that you can even see their boxer shorts. Oh no!!

They are wearing caps, and those caps are worn sideways. These people don't come to church and they have the audacity to come to church, keeping their hats on during church!? What!!? Oh no!! We need to teach them some proper respect, the church might say.

They never come to church and the first they hear is to take your hat off and have some respect. No!! As we grow in Christ, yes, I think that our attire should be respectful toward the Lord. Attire is important, but what about people that don't know the Lord. They have not come into a relationship yet. What do we want them to hear first?

Somebody else comes and this person is ragged and soiled and dirty. This person reeks of smoke, a blend of cigarette and marijuana smoke. It does not seem like they are interested in working for a living. And here comes a team of them. Is the church a little bit touchy and standoffish? What kind of welcome do they receive?

Let's continue with this, because I think there are more nerves that can be touched when we consider the nature of the sinners and the tax collectors in those First Century villages of Palestine. Imagine some twisted and corrupt and crooked politicians from the other side of the aisle showing up?

Imagine the administrators of an abortion facility showing up. And these are people that have not only provided abortions, but these are people who have influenced young women to terminate the beating heart inside of them. They have urged them to do that, and here they come.

Let's imagine some drug dealers that are known drug dealers. They have made a good living for themselves by getting young people trapped in addiction. Let's get closer even still and say that these are people that not only have affected society in such a negative way with such sin, but it has hit your home.

Your particular family has been affected by these people's sin. And here they come for church. Here they come to the Bible study. And at that point, they have not indicated a clear turnaround in their lives. But here they are, and what is your response?

This is how these tax collectors were. They worked for Rome getting money from the Israelites for the enemy, extracting even more out so that they could live very wealthy and padded lives themselves. It was the same with the sinners. And what was the response of the Pharisees of them coming close? They were grumbling and asking what they were doing there!

That is because all the Pharisees could see was their sin. That is what they could see. Perhaps that is all they wanted to see. Believe this, Jesus saw it too. He is the Lord of holiness and justice. Jesus has the fortitude to bring judgement upon sin and, even more so, those who commit sin.

There is a place called hell. Jesus sees the sin. He sees more sin than you and I do. He saw more of the sin than the Pharisees did. He saw more! And I would say that the reaction of His holiness was even stronger. Jesus saw more. Jesus had a vision of their repentance.

Jesus had a vision of their hearts being humbled under the teaching of the Word. He detected sparks of life in the sinners and tax collectors. He knew that their ears were opening and that some of them were being drawn in. Jesus had a vision and knowledge of the work of salvation that comes into the lives of even such sinners, by God's grace.

So we see Jesus being perceptive of this and reacting in a way that was very, very, very different from the Pharisees. Did you see it there?

¹Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

How different the behavior of King Jesus to the muttering Pharisees. We see His response depicted in their criticism of Him. Verse 2:

²... "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Sinners! Understand the force of that word.

²... "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

This is not passive language. This is active. It is an active picture. The language of *receives* has a nuance of welcoming them. It is a picture of someone glad to see someone else arriving.

Jesus went on, not only to have a glad spirit that they showed up, but He went on to share a meal with them and in that First Century context, sharing a meal was indicative of some kind of friendly fellowship.

So we have the Lord of light, the God of holiness, the Almighty Creator of all things, Jesus, and there He was dipping flatbread in a common dish of sauce with sinful hands. Wow!! This is because Jesus had eyes to see what the grace of God could do in those sinners.

Do you know what the word *grace* means? Is grace God's mercy and even His favor on the undeserving, yes. But is it perhaps even more than that? Haven't we talked about this as His grace upon the ill-deserving? Sinners, people who have transgressed. We just need to have eyes to see and hearts to perceive what God can do in people's lives. We also need to pray that He would do that in people's lives and to even use us to participate in it.

That is why these parables were given next. Jesus gave these two parables of the parables of the lost coming home to put that desire within us to see sinners come to repentance. We see this in *The Parable of the Lost Sheep* and in *The Parable of the Lost Coin*.

Looking at these two passages of Scripture, they take the muttering of the Pharisees and they contrast that with the joy of Heaven. It is a pretty astonishing thing to see. This morning I want for you to know that these two parables are basically one in the same. They are both illustrating the same truths and God's vital concern for the lost and His great desire that they be saved. We see His exuberant joy over the found.

We see God's vital concern for the lost. Then we see God's exuberant joy over the found. Let's pray that He will put these in our hearts as well. Let's reflect back on these parables for a few moments.

Both of these parables reveal to us:

1. God's vital concern for the lost (4, 8)

In the first parable, we have *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*, where we see a shepherd depicted for us. It was probably late afternoon and he was doing his daily count. He had a flock of one hundred.

How many did he count in his first count of the sheep? He counted ninety-nine, so the shepherd went back and recounted his sheep and still counted ninety-nine. He wanted to know where the other sheep was. He knew the one sheep was missing.

What did he do? This passage tells us that he left the ninety-nine in the wilderness, in the open country, and went out in search of the one that had not been found. Such was his vital concern for that lost sheep, and his desire for it to be back in the pen.

What is so amazing and challenging for me is that that his passages says that he left the ninety-nine, not in the safety and the security of the pen. Verse 4:

⁴...if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lose, until he finds it?

The open country? It was a sizable flock. A hundred is a pretty good-sized flock of sheep, so it could be that this shepherd had under shepherds. It is reasonable to think that he left the ninety-nine in the open under the care of the under shepherds.

However, the interesting thing is that is not what this parable says. I don't know if you have noticed this about Jesus or not, but sometimes He said surprising things in the midst of the parables that He gave. Perhaps this is a deliberate twist in the story. The shepherd left the ninety-nine and he went to find that one. There is some risk involved and that's how great his heart was for the lost.

As a pastor, I have been wrestling with that this week. This is how the Lord has been ministering to the heart of Jeff this week. I wonder if there is a prophetic picture here of one of the challenges of pastoral ministry?

It is the fact that doing the work of a shepherd in the church, the genuine needs of the flock are so serious and so persistent that it is easy for a pastor or an elder or a church leader to have their lives consumed with the flock of God. It is a good thing to have your life consumed with the flock of God.

However, maybe the Lord is saying that often there are going to be times where Christian leaders, even though there are so many difficult things and so many aspects of care that need to happen, they need to separate themselves for the sake of getting out and reaching people who need to be reached. It is not always easy to do that.

It has kind of risen up in my heart as an irony this week that in my years of pastoral ministry compared to my time as a growing Christian prior to entering into the ministry, I was among the lost so much more, doing so much more witnessing in those years in my 20s than in the years that I began seminary and into pastoral work.

Maybe there is a discipline that needs to be had among those who are in Christian leadership, because we see the deep struggles even within the family of God. You carry those with you everywhere you go, even on vacation by the way. Sometimes it is hard to separate yourself.

But the flock of God needs to be praying for the shepherds that they will set an example of also going out there among the lost and seeking to bring them. I need your prayers in that. We need your payers in that, and we need to have that among all those who are among the church.

It is so easy to just be consumed within the church. I wonder if we at Bethel Grace are slanting way over that way. We need to pray that the Lord will help us to be obedient in going after the sinners that need to be saved. I see the faces of a great many who are so active in evangelism and that inspires me.

There is also this woman who lost one silver coin out of ten. That one silver coin was a *drachma*, that was one day's wages. Some people might say that one day's wages is a hundred dollars. Some might say that is it a thousand dollars. For most people, it is probably somewhere in between. But it is a significant sum. It is a whole day's wages.

I read that in ancient Palestine that young women were often given ten silver coins as wedding gift and they often strung them together on a cord in the form of a necklace. So, if that were the case, this woman lost a coin that not only had monetary value, but sentimental value as well.

It might be like the woman who lost one of the stones on the ring that she got for her wedding. So this woman was looking and looking and said, No, nine is not enough. I need to go out and find the other one as well.

These two pictures are one in the same—God's vital concern for the lost! We need to pray that the Lord would put this burden in our hearts as well. There is a second point that is probably even the more emphatic point. We also see:

2. God's exuberant joy over the found (5,7, 9-10)

To those who come to faith and have their lives transformed by grace. Both parables present a picture of the joy of the Lord. As we have noted, it is a joy that cannot be contained. It is a kind of joy that must be shared with others. Both parables are through a party, gathering their friends.

Isn't that the case with joy? Kristy is not a woman to take to Facebook too often, but when she got that diamond from her ring back, she even got on Facebook and told that story. You got to tell people about your joy.

There is this joy present in these parables. There is the joy of the Lord's saving and there is the joy that rises up in being a part of that. Notice this: What we see in these parables, is that Jesus concluded both stories by moving from the hypothetical world of the parable into the actual experience of Heaven, when a person that was lost are found and come into repentant faith in Christ.

Did you notice that? Did you see the powerful sentences that conclude the parables? Verse 7 says:

⁷Just 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.

What does that mean?

⁷...there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

What in the world, especially if you have read the Scripture in the Old and New Testament about there is no one righteous, no not one. What was Jesus talking about here?

There are two major views that I came across this week. I am leaning toward one of them. First view is that Jesus was speaking of ninety-nine self-righteous people, who in their blindness don't think they need repentance. This fits with the context, because there is an example of that in the Pharisees.

We read that throughout the Gospel of Luke. The Pharisees trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt, it says in Luke 18:9. So this passage could be saying there is more joy in heaven over one who truly gets it and understands their need of repentance than over ninety-nine people who think they don't need to repent.

My struggle with that view is the comparative force of this very important text—more joy in heaven over the one who repents than over the ninety-nine who do not. What joy in heaven could there be over self-righteous people who don't think that they need to confess their sin to God and repent, because they are lost sinners just like the tax collectors?

I was struggling with that view, and lean toward the second view. Jesus was speaking of those given the gift of righteousness by faith. Just like Abraham and David in the Old Testament as we read in the book of Romans, they were justified by faith, counted righteous by God.

What we have here is the new covenant community in Christ, those who are given the righteousness of the Messiah. What it means is in Heaven there is this ongoing settled joy and gladness over the company of the redeemed, and when a sinner comes to faith and trust in Jesus, there is a surge in that joy as they enter into the life that God has prepared for them.

That is pretty cool to think about! Yes, the Lord has joy over those who have been given the gift of righteousness. It kind of gets cranked up in Heaven when somebody enters into that. I think that is a neat picture. The bottom line here is that Jesus was saying, *Look, there is joy, like a celebration in Heaven when somebody comes to faith in Christ.* It is a beautiful picture.

Then in Verse 10 we have another one of these statements. I think Verse 10 is one of the most wonderful and intriguing statements of the Bible. Jesus said:

¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

There is a glimpse into the Throne Room. *There is joy before the angels of God.* Look at that carefully and notice that that does say that there is joy in the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

That being the case, I think it is safe to assume that the angels do rejoice in these things. Angels are presented in the pages of Scripture as joyful beings, especially pertaining to God's work in salvation.

So it is reasonable to think that angels rejoice in these things, but that is not what this verse is saying. It says, *There is joy before the angels of God.* It is a joy that is out in front of them. It is something that they are beholding.

Brothers and sisters, who are the angels beholding in Heaven? The Living God! Perhaps, this is a glimpse of the joy of the heart of the Father when people come into a walk with Christ through faith. That is pretty awesome to think about. Understand, they come by repentance. That word *repentance* is used over and over again in this text.

Kristy and I, we have three boys. You at Bethel Grace are familiar with those boys. We think that they are awesome boys. We love these boys. Growing up one of our boys, I will not name him, had this seed of mischief in him.

Several times, there would be church functions and it would almost be time to go home. I would ask Kristy if he was with her. She would tell me that she thought he was with me. Where is he? We would look everywhere for this precious boy of ours. It came to the point of panic on a couple of occasions because we could not find him.

We would begin to look for him, along with other members of Bethel Grace! One of the times, we found him under the desk in the AWANA Office. Another time, we found him behind a bush. Our hearts were desperate, wondering where our boy was.

Once we found out what he had been doing, yes, there was an element of—you are never to do that again—but first and foremost, there was hugs and relief because we had found him safe. There is the depiction of this kind of joy in this text in the heart of the Father as faith rises up in hearts that have been humbled by the preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom.

Understand, there is a moral nuance to being lost. This is going to become crystal clear as we look at *The Parable of the Lost Son*, who went off and lost from his father and he did that in rebellion.

There are people all around us that deliberately sin. They don't want the light of God shining on their lives. If you are in that condition, you need to know that you are being beckoned by the Gospel to come into the Light. You must repent and turn from sin and ask God for forgiveness.

But understand, there is a Father in Heaven who will receive you with arms of love as you repent and turn to Jesus. Jesus is the One who died for your sin. Jesus is the One who washes away every stain. Come from darkness into the Light and enter into the Kingdom. For those of us who are in Christ, let's pray that the Lord will give us a heart to participate in these things.

With, I am going to pray. Then we are going to spend some time at the Lord's Supper, asking the Lord to refresh us in the joy of our own salvation, and to continue to develop the heart of Christ within us by grace.

Let's pray.