

God Rejoices When One Sinner Repents

Luke 15:1-32

Key Verse: 15:31, 32

“My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

Luke 15 is one of the best-known and best-loved stories in the Bible and in world literature. No human being is able to invent such a story. It is because these parables were written by God himself. Jesus teaches the Pharisees and the Scribes three parables to teach them the heart of God for the lost sheep. This passage begins with the tax collectors and sinners all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling, because Jesus was welcoming the tax collectors and sinners and eating with them. The Pharisees and scribes saw the tax collectors and sinners as bad influences and they cast them out of the synagogue. But Jesus welcomed them. Jesus told three beautiful parables to reveal the heart of God for lost souls and the joy of finding each one.

First, the parable of the lost sheep (3-7).

Look at verses 3-4. **“Then Jesus told them this parable: ‘Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?’”** In Jesus’ days, shepherds tended flocks in the open country. The shepherd would count his sheep each night. He knew each sheep by name. To the shepherd, each of his sheep was very valuable and precious. If he loses one of his sheep, he leaves the 99 and goes searching for his lost sheep until he finds it. In the Bible sinners are comparable to lost sheep, and good Bible teachers are like good shepherds. A good shepherd knows where to look for his lost sheep, like the basketball courts, or the swimming pool, or the shopping malls, or even a rave party. The shepherd never gives up searching until he finds his lost sheep, because he knows his lost sheep cannot find its own way home. If the shepherd did not love his sheep, he would say, “Well, I still have 99 sheep; losing one sheep does not matter much.” But this shepherd was a good shepherd. He went after his lost sheep until he found it. Why? It was because he has compassion for his sheep.

What did he do when he found his sheep? Verses 5-6 say, **“he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me: I have found my lost sheep.’”** Finding his

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lost sheep fills him with great joy. He puts his sheep on his shoulders and goes home singing and shouting with great joy. He also invites all his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him. Look at verse 7. **“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”** This verse teaches about God’s utmost joy over one sinner who repents. God does not want anyone to be lost, but everyone to repent and be saved. This is the heart of God.

Second, the parable of the lost coin (8-10).

Look at verse 8. **“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?”** A rich woman might not even bother if she lost one silver coin. But for a poor widow, one silver coin is very precious. Perhaps she was a widow or a single woman saving for her marriage. One silver coin was very precious and valuable to her. When she lost one, she lit a lamp, swept every corner of the house, and moved all her furniture. She kept searching until she found it. Why? Because it was very valuable to her. The intensive search of this woman expresses God’s heart in searching for lost sinners. God will never give up on anyone because he created us. We are an eternal being created in the image of God. He values each one of us.

What did she do when she found the lost coin? Verse 9 says, **“and when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’”** Have you ever lost something of value: like a cell phone, car keys, or wedding ring. The other day Dr. Jose Ahn was in Latin America and he lost his bag at the airport, along with his laptop, cell phone, and camera. You can imagine the intensity of his search trying to find it. On top of that, he thought he lost his passport. But when he found his passport in his pocket, he was so happy and shared his joy with Dr. John Jun. Jesus said in verse 10. **“In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”** God has great joy when lost sinners are found.

Third, the parable of the lost son (11-32).

Look at verses 11-12. **“There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.”** Usually an estate is divided among children after the death of the father who owns it. But the younger son demanded his share of the inheritance saying, “I want it now!” Imagine the father’s heart for his son. He

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provided everything for him: the best food, the finest clothes and the best education as well as discipline to raise him as a great man. But the son never appreciated it. What he should have seen as a blessing he saw as a burden. What he should have seen as protection, discipline and love from his father, he saw as unnecessary restrictions. Maybe he just turned 18. He might have felt he was controlled by his father and had no freedom to do whatever he wanted. He heard about many exciting things happening elsewhere and he felt he was missing something.

His father could have refused his son's request saying, "No!" or he could have negotiated with him to hold on to his son. His father certainly would not want his son to take his inheritance and misuse it. Even though the father knew his son was going to waste his money and ruin his life, he still gave it to him. No father would do that. Romans 1:24-28 says that when people persist in sin God gives them over to their sinful desires. The father knew that his son would suffer tremendously without his father's protection and love. But he respected the son's freedom of choice and let him do it in the hope through his experienced of failure one day he would repent and come back.

What did the younger son do with the money? Look at verse 13. **"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living."** With the money, he bought a motorcycle and drove far away, as far as he could go, where he could do whatever he wanted with nobody watching him.

He "squandered his wealth." This means that he "scattered it in reckless living." He spent his money on wild pleasures and luxuries: drugs, alcohol, gambling and sex. He said, "I don't care how much it costs, give me the best and give it to me right now." He was so excited to have the freedom of no one watching him, doing whatever he wanted. Some opportunistic people hung around him, following him to bars, nightclubs, casinos and expensive restaurants. He did not think that the money and the fun would ever run out.

But one day, when he went to withdraw money, he found his bank account had a 0 balance and his pockets were empty. His so-called friends stopped hanging around him. All his girlfriends turned off their cell phones. Suddenly he found himself on the streets with his broken motorcycle, empty pockets and no friends. He became a hitch-hiker with no one to care about him.

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Things got even worse. Look at verse 14. **“After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.”** At this point, “the party was officially over.” He had no one to turn to. He was in desperate need to find a means to survive. **“So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his field to feed pigs.”** This was not the kind of job he was looking for, but since he never got a degree and had no work experience, it was the only job he could get. Pigs are dirty, they roll around and eat and sleep in the mud. He was feeding the pigs that only a pig would eat, scooping it up and giving it to the pigs! Yuck!

Look at verse 16. **“He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.”** Probably you have never been so hungry that you wanted to eat pig’s food. That is as low as a person can go. Even people living on welfare are not close to the poverty he had gone through. The younger son never saw this coming. It never occurred to him what is really out there in this world.

In such a desperate situation what did he remember? Look at verse 17. **“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’”** Up to this point he lived senselessly, without thinking. But when he longed to fill his stomach with pig food, he came to his senses. Now, his mind was awakened to reality. The things he could not see before were now incredibly obvious to him. He remembered how his father treated his servants, the abundant food they ate with still food to spare, and how happy they were under his father’s care and protection. He remembered many good things about his father that he could not see before. He realized that his father was such a wise, good and generous man. In contrast to his father, he also realized that he was such an ungrateful, unthankful, rebellious and disobedient. He repented of leaving his father’s home and his foolish wild living. But he did not stop there. He did not just regret or feeling sorry for what had done. True repentance is turning to God. That is what the prodigal son did. Look at verse 18. **“I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father.”**

What was the father doing while his younger son was away? The father must have worried about his younger son night and day and prayed for him. He must have looked at the horizon each day to see if his son was coming home. This is how God waits night and day for his lost children to come back home (Ro 10:21).

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Look at verse 20b. **“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”** The lost son must have been dirty and smelly and unshaven. But the father did not tell him to take a shower first and talk later. When the father saw his prodigal son returning, he understood him from his son’s point of view. He was making a baby step of faith to come home yet with intense shame, guilt and humiliation. As he came closer and closer home, the son might have wondered if he would be accepted by his father. But look at what the father did. When the father saw him, he was filled with compassion. Although his son broke his heart and made him very sorrowful, when he saw him, he forgot everything because he had compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. I really like the words “he ran to his son.” In all the Scriptures only this parable tells about God running. He runs to meet his lost son. This is God’s character. He runs to sinners who are repenting and coming home. God loves us and forgives us unconditionally when we repent and come to him just as we are.

The heart of God is best described in the following verses. Look at verse 21. **“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’”** As he had rehearsed before coming home, he wanted to ask his father to hire him as one of his servants. His father however, did not even enter into that discussion. Instead he turned to his servants and said, in verses 22-24. **“Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate.”** There are no words that can fully describe the degree of the joy of the father as well as the joy of the son. The father restored his son as a son and heir.

The parable could end here, but there was another son, the elder son. In contrast to the younger son, the older brother was always with his father. He had everything. But when his younger brother returned, his real problem was exposed. When he found that there was a celebration for his younger brother’s return, he became angry and refused to go in. It is clear that he didn’t have any love or compassion toward his brother. In other words, he did not know his father’s heart. To a father, when a son rebels and leaves home, he grieves, and nothing will comfort him. Since the day his son left home, the father felt things had never been right at home. But when his younger son came back, it was like a dead son was alive again. The father felt the joy that words cannot describe. The father really

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wanted his older son to have compassion for his brother, and also experience the joy of welcoming back his brother. So the father pleaded with him, **“My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found”** (31-32). But the older son refused to accept the father’s invitation. The older son was in fact breaking his father’s heart more than the younger son. The older son was also a lost son, even though he was always with his father physically. Here the older son represents the Pharisees and the scribes who were always at the temple of God but who didn’t know God’s heart for tax collectors and sinners. God’s heart is the same today. As shepherds for God’s flock, we need to have God’s heart that longs day and night, searching and waiting and praying with hope to find those who are lost in their sins.

This passage helps me realize how I should live my life after I have been forgiven, becoming an heir of God. When I was a young Christian, to serve young students with God’s word and food was my joy. I was overwhelmed by the love of God and had as many as 20 one to one Bible studies. But these days instead of being filled with joy, I feel like the older son, serving the work of God with not much joy. I find myself not having heart and compassion for those students who stopped Bible studies. I long to have the overwhelming joy in the love of God that I used to have many years ago. However, for quite a long time I wasn’t sure how to recover. Jesus teaches me, **“my son, you are always with me, and everything is yours....”** These words remind me that I just have to repent and turn to God. I repent for such mentality and have wasted many years and I make a new decision to learn the heart of God.

In this passage we learn the heart of God. God values each person precious. God does not want anyone to be lost. He is still watching and waiting for his lost children to come home. God rejoices most when one sinner repents and returns to him. There are so many prodigal sons and daughters all over the world. They need shepherds and Bible teachers who can bring them to come back to their Father God. May God help us to learn the heart of God today.