

Luke Chapter 15

Luke 15:1 "Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him."

"All the publicans and sinners" Despite the difficulties of Christ's message (14:25-35), the outcasts of society were drawn to Him, while the religious leaders grew more and more determined to kill Him (1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Luke 15:2 "And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

"Murmured, saying": Literally "murmured greatly", i.e., through the crowds. Their grumbling prompted 3 parables designed to illustrate the joy of God over the repentance of sinners.

"This man receiveth sinners": This phrase is the key to the trilogy of parables that follow. Christ was not ashamed to be known as a "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (7:34).

There was no chance of a scribe or Pharisee ever winning anyone to God, because they totally separated themselves from what they called sinners. Jesus looked on the heart and not the outward appearance of man.

Many of these people that the scribes and Pharisees called sinners had a more tender heart toward the things of God than they did.

Luke 15:3-4 "And he spake this parable unto them, saying," "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?"

"Go after that which is lost, until he find it": The first two parables both picture God as taking the initiative in seeking sinners. The rabbis taught that God would receive sinners who sought His forgiveness earnestly enough, but here God is the One seeking the sinner.

The shepherd in the Middle East was responsible for every sheep. He was obligated to his master to see that none was lost, killed, or injured (Matt. 18:11-14).

Jesus completely ignores their accusation and answers with a parable. Jesus is proving by His parable here the worth of a man's soul. Another place He says He did not come to save the ones who do not need a Savior. Jesus comes for the lost.

These Pharisees know that this parable Jesus tells them is true. The ninety and nine don't need a Savior, they are not lost. The one sheep needs a Savior, he is lost. Even a worldly shepherd who lost a sheep would go and search for it and bring it back into the fold, much more the heavenly Shepherd would go and search for His sheep.

Luke 15:5 "And when he hath found [it], he layeth [it] on his shoulders, rejoicing."

“Layeth it on his shoulders”: The picture of a loving shepherd (John 10:11; Psalm 24:1).

“Rejoicing”: Joy over the return of the lost is the most prominent feature in all 3 parables (verses 7, 10, 32).

This is the very thing we do when we come to Jesus. We lay our sins and burdens on His shoulders, and He carries us to safety in His arms.

Luke 15:6 "And when he cometh home, he calleth together [his] friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost."

The parable Jesus told about the prodigal son comes to mind when I look at the Scripture above. God does appreciate the 99 who stayed faithful and was never lost, but the joy of this one is that he was grasped out of the hands of Satan just before he destroyed him and now the 100 are back together again.

Luke 15:7 "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

“Joy shall be in heaven”: A reference to the joy of God Himself. There was complaining on earth, among the Pharisees (verse 2); but there was great joy with God and among the angels in heaven (verse 10).

One soul is important to God. He is not willing that even one will be lost. The angels as well as God, rejoice when one is brought back into the fold.

Luke 15:8 "Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find [it]?"

“Silver coins”: The drachma was a Greek coin roughly equivalent in value to the Roman denarius.

“Light a candle”: The typical one-room house had no windows.

“Sweep the house”: This illustrates the thoroughness of the search.

Luke 15:9 "And when she hath found [it], she calleth [her] friends and [her] neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost."

We see again, almost the same story here as in the lost sheep. Silver is symbolic of redemption. This really has to do with this woman losing something of her standing with God. Perhaps she has backslidden in some area. This parable speaks of something this woman had and lost.

She is overjoyed when she finds this coin. I believe this indicates that she finds her first love of God again and is restored. Here again (in verse 10), we see the heavenly angels rejoicing with

her over the lost being found. Another way of looking at this is the woman being viewed as the church and when a backslidden member comes back, she (the church), rejoices.

Luke 15:10 "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

We see again in this as before, that just one soul is very important to God.

Verses 11-12: The parable of the prodigal son is the most familiar and beloved of all Christ's parables. It is one of the longest and most detailed parable. And unlike most parables, it has more than one lesson. The prodigal is an example of sound repentance.

The elder brother illustrates the wickedness of the Pharisees' self-righteousness, prejudice and indifference toward repenting sinners. And the father pictures God, eager to forgive and longing for the return of the sinner.

The main feature however, as in the other two parables in this chapter, is the joy of God. And the celebrations that fill heaven when a sinner repents.

Luke 15:11-12 "And he said, A certain man had two sons:" "And the younger of them said to [his] father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth [to me]. And he divided unto them [his] living."

"Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me": A shocking request, tantamount to saying he wished his father were dead. He was not entitled to any inheritance while his father still lived.

Yet the father graciously fulfilled the request, giving him his full share, which would have been one-third of the entire estate, because the right of the firstborn (Deut. 21:17), gave the elder brother a double portion.

This act pictures all sinners (related to God the Father by creation), who waste their potential privileges and refuse any relationship with Him, choosing instead a life of sinful self-indulgence.

We can see in this the fact that God has made us a free agent. If it is our will to leave, He will not stop us. God wants our love and loyalty because we desire to give it, not because we are forced too. This son really wants to do his own thing. He rebels against authority at home and wants to be his own boss.

Luke 15:13 "And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."

"Gathered all together": The prodigal son evidently took his share in liquid assets and left, abandoning his father and heading into a life of iniquity.

“Riotous living”: Not merely wasteful extravagance, but also wanton immorality (verse 30). The Greek word for “loose” means “dissolute,” or “wasteful,” and conveys the idea of an utterly debauched lifestyle.

This journey here is like the journey we take through life. Some people, like the older brother here, never wander into a life of sin. They are saved at a very early age and remain a Christian all their lives.

This is not true with the young brother here. He wants the things of the world and follows that way of life, never thinking of loyalty to the father. We all have an inheritance; some of us lose it by choosing the world.

Luke 15:14-15 "And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want." "And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine."

“To feed swine”: This was the worst sort of degradation imaginable for Jesus’ Jewish audience; swine were the worst sort of unclean animals.

Luke 15:16 "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him."

“Would fain have filled his belly with the husks”: i.e. Carob pods, used to feed swine but virtually indigestible for humans. In other words, the only reason he did not eat the same food as the swine is that he could not.

“No man gave unto him”: He could not even eke out a living by begging. His situation could hardly have been more desperate. Thus, he symbolizes the estranged sinner who is helplessly in despair.

Sin and worldliness lead to desperation. Suddenly, he finds himself in serious trouble with no father to help him. He looks to the world for answers to the problems and winds up in even worse shape. The world has only selfish motives for giving him a job.

For a Hebrew to feed unclean swine would be a very degrading job. He was hungry, dirty, and had no one to look to for help. This is the way most of us are before we turn to the Lord for help.

Luke 15:17 "And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!"

“Came to himself”: When his incessant sinning had left him utterly bankrupt and hungry, he was able to think more clearly in that condition, he was a candidate for salvation.

Luke 15:18 "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,"

“Will say unto him”: He carefully contemplated what he would say and counted the cost of his repentance (verse 19).

“Sinned against heaven”: A euphemism; meaning he had sinned against God. He not only realized the futility of his situation, but he also understood the gravity of his transgressions against the father.

Luke 15:19 "And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."

This son has found no answers to his problems in this world. He has fallen about as far as you can go, and there is only one way left and that is up. We see a man with a repentant heart. He wants to confess that he has made a mess of his life and that he is willing to do anything his father asks to get back into good graces with him.

You know everything in the world is God's creation. We all belong to Him. It seems that nearly everyone has to hit bottom as this son did, before they will repent and ask God into their lives. Here, this son is making the father his Lord, as well.

Luke 15:20 "And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

“His father saw him”: Clearly, the father had been waiting and looking for his son’s return.

“Ran”: The father’s eagerness and joy at his son’s return is unmistakable. This is the magnificent attribute of God that sets Him apart from all the false gods invented by men and demons. He is not indifferent or hostile, but a Savior by nature, longing to see sinners repent and rejoicing when they do.

From Genesis 3:8 to Revelation 22:17; from the fall to the consummation; God has been and will be seeking to save sinners, and rejoicing each time one repents and is converted.

We see that the father had been waiting for this very moment for his son to come home. He loves him so much that he welcomes this sinner home with a kiss.

Luke 15:21 "And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

Note that the son did not get to finish his rehearsed words of repentance before the father interrupted to grant forgiveness. This pictures God’s eagerness to forgive.

We see here, the son repents with everything in him. He confesses that he is not worthy to receive forgiveness.

Luke 15:22 "But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put [it] on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on [his] feet:"

“The father said”: Without a single word of rebuke for the past, the father pours out his love for the son, and expresses his joy that what was lost had been found. Each of the father’s gifts said something unique about his acceptance of the son:

“Robe”: Reserved for the guest of honor.

“Ring”: A symbol of authority.

“Sandals”: These were not usually worn by slaves, and therefore signified his full restoration to sonship.

Luke 15:23 "And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill [it]; and let us eat, and be merry:"

“The fatted calf”: Reserved only for the most special of occasions, a sacrifice or a feast of great celebration. All this (verses 22-23), symbolizes the lavishness of salvation’s blessings (Eph. 1:3; 2:4-7).

Luke 15:24 "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

The best robe the Christian can receive is the white linen robe of righteousness. It shows that we are in right standing with God. We receive it not because we deserve it, but because He loved us and forgave us.

This son was dead in trespasses and sins and is alive forevermore. This is something to be merry about. We see in this ring that he is now family. We see in the shoes that he must walk in this salvation he has acquired as a free gift.

Luke 15:25 "Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing."

“Elder son”: He symbolizes the Pharisee, the hypocritical religious person, who stays close to the place of the Father (the temple). But has no sense of sin, no real love for the Father so as to share in His joy, and no interest in repenting sinners.

Luke 15:26 "And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant."

“And asked what these things meant”: For self-righteous persons, as these Scribes and Pharisees were, are ignorant of the truths of the Gospel. They do not understand them, nor conceive what is meant by them they cannot take in the doctrine of God’s everlasting love.

They know nothing of the covenant of grace, nor have any other notion but of a covenant of works. And if of any other, yet a conditional one, made with them upon their conversion; or rather, one of their own making and which depends on their good behavior.

Luke 15:27 "And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound."

What must that temper be, which stirs up a man to despise and abhor those for whom the Savior shed his precious blood, who are objects of the Father's choice, and temples of the Holy Ghost! This springs from pride, self-preference, and ignorance of a man's own heart.

The mercy and grace of our God in Christ, shine almost as bright in his tender and gentle bearing with peevish saints, as his receiving prodigal sinners upon their repentance. It is the unspeakable happiness of all the children of God, who keep close to their Father's house; that they are, and shall be ever with him. Happy will it be for those who thankfully accept Christ's invitation.

Luke 15:28 "And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him."

In the latter part of this parable we have the character of the Pharisees, though not of them alone. It sets forth the kindness of the Lord, and the proud manner in which his gracious kindness is often received. The Jews in general, showed the same spirit towards the converted Gentiles; and numbers in every age object to the gospel and its preachers, on the same ground.

We see here, the jealousy of the older brother. The Physical house of Israel thought themselves above their heathen brothers and did not believe they were worth saving. Looking at this, from the old-time believers, they are sometimes jealous because they feel some new Christian is getting too much attention.

Luke 15:29 "And he answering said to [his] father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:"

"I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time": Unlikely, given the boy's obvious contempt for his father, shown by his refusal to participate in the father's great joy. This statement reveals the telltale problem with all religious hypocrites. They will not recognize their sin and repent. The elder son's comment reeks of the same spirit as the words of the Pharisee (in 18:11).

"Yet thou never gavest me a kid": All those years of service to the father appear to have been motivated too much by concern for what he could get for himself. This son's self-righteous behavior was more socially acceptable than the younger brother's debauchery, but it was equally dishonoring to the father, and called for repentance.

Luke 15:30 "But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

"Thy son was come": An expression of deep contempt ("this tax collector" in 18:11). He could not bring himself to refer to him as "my brother".

Here again, this could be physical Israel complaining that they have kept the law and lived a strict life. They do not understand God through forgiveness and grace alone restoring the son, and even it appears, favoring the younger son.

Luke 15:31 "And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

“All that I have is thine”: The inheritance had already been distributed (verse 12). Everything the father had was literally in the elder son’s possession. Yet the elder son was begrudging even the love the father showed to the prodigal son.

The Pharisees and scribes had easy access to all the riches of God’s truth. They spent their lives dealing with Scripture and public worship, but they never really possessed any of the treasures enjoyed by the repentant sinner.

Luke 15:32 "It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

“We should make merry”: This summarizes the point of all 3 parables.

Salvation was offered to physical Israel first. In fact, it has always been there for them. All they had to do was take it. The Lord here, reminds the older brother that he should be rejoicing for this, that his brother who was lost and now is found.

Luke Chapter 15 Questions

1. Who did the Pharisees think it was wrong to fellowship with?
2. Why was it impossible for a Pharisee to win anyone to God?
3. In the parable how many sheep did the man have?
4. How many of those were lost?
5. What did the man do when he realized a sheep was lost?
6. What is Jesus proving with this first parable?
7. What does the shepherd do on finding the sheep?
8. What is this lost sheep symbolic of?
9. What does the Christian do when he or she receives Jesus as Savior?
10. There is joy in heaven over _____ who was lost and is found.

11. Who is rejoicing in heaven?
12. Why were they not rejoicing over the 99 others?
13. Who is the second parable about?
14. What has she lost?
15. Since silver means redemption, what had she lost symbolically?
16. What is another idea who the "she" could be, symbolically?
17. In the parable about the prodigal son, how many sons did the man have?
18. Why does God not over rule us and do things His way?
19. What did this younger son do with his inheritance?
20. After his money was gone, what terrible thing happened in the land that caused him to take a job feeding swine?
21. What did he have to eat?
22. Sin and worldliness lead to what?
23. What did the young son decide to do at his most desperate point?
24. How did his father greet him?
25. What did the young son tell the father he was willing to be since he was not worthy to be his son?
26. What three things did his father give him?
27. Who was angry about this?
28. Who do you believe the oldest son to be symbolic of?
29. What did the father say to the eldest son about the younger?
30. Who was salvation offered to first?