

Joy - The Lost Coin and Sheep

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Date: 27 December 2020

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[0 : 0 0] So we're going to be in very familiar territory today as we read our Bibles. We're going to be in Luke's Gospel, chapter 15.

If you've got a Bible, do take the time to get it. It'll be helpful for us as we look through it. Let me say again, also to the boys and girls, you will know these stories.

So listen in, stick with us and you'll discover some wonderful truths as we think about these familiar stories.

So Luke chapter 15 and at verse 1. Let's read and hear God's word together.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, this man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Then Jesus told them this parable.

[0 : 5 7] Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home.

Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, rejoice with me, I have found my lost sheep. In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner.

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 people who do not need to repent. Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?

And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, rejoice with me, I have found my lost coin. In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Jesus continued, 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.

[1 : 5 9] Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth and wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have food to spare and here I am starving to death. 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 servants. So he got up and went to his father. 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 son said to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

[3 : 05] But the father said to his servants, 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. Meanwhile, the elder son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

Your brother has come, he replied, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound. The elder brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

But he answered his father, look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him.

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.

[4 : 10] He was lost and is found. So our question today is what gives Jesus joy? And the answer that we see from these parables is that Jesus has joy in saving sinners.

Joy, of course, big theme at Christmas. The angels, we remember, to the shepherds, they brought good news of great joy for all the people. And we've seen just some of the joyful worshippers that we meet as Jesus, the son of God, is born into our world.

So we see the shepherds and we've seen the Magi. But then you go to the temple and you see Simeon and Anna, those elderly worshippers, and they have joy that God's saviour has been revealed to them.

Usually we think about Christmas and we think instinctively of joy, don't we? A joy of family and friends, of gifts given and received. And of course, this year has perhaps been quite a different set of experiences.

And that's maybe brought quite a different range of emotions. But that's why it's important for us to fix our eyes again on Jesus. To see that the coming of Jesus is the coming of unbreakable joy.

[5 : 26] Joy that will never end. Here in Jesus is the promise of salvation, the promise of eternal life, knowing God now and for life in eternity.

So as we began the year looking to Jesus, we'll finish the year looking to Jesus. And I hope every day of our life is about looking to Jesus. Today, let's see what joy, let's see what brings Jesus joy.

And let's see how that's tied to why Jesus came. Jesus came to be the saviour of the world. And Jesus has joy as saviour in taking those who were lost and making them found.

As we see in our stories. Jesus has joy in saving sinners. So we come to these three stories that belong together.

And the third of which is sometimes described as the most famous story ever told. Perhaps even people who don't read their Bibles will still know the idea of the prodigal son or the lost son.

[6 : 37] But before we get into the stories, let's have a think about why the stories are told. So boys and girls, you can have a look at verses 1 and 2 of chapter 15.

And you will see three characters that are involved there. Real life people who then are included in Jesus' stories. So we meet Jesus.

And we see people are gathering to hear him. And we see that Jesus is welcoming sinners. Jesus has come to seek and to save the lost. And he's showing hospitality and kindness to sinners.

And this surprises, even shocks some of the people around. So there is Jesus. There are the people described as tax collectors and sinners.

They were known by the Pharisees and the religious folks as outsiders. Morally, socially, religiously considered to be unclean and unworthy.

[7 : 45] They were like the bad guys, as the religious folks thought. But it's really interesting to see that when Jesus comes, announcing his kingdom, bringing a message of God's grace, undeserved kindness and favour, they are so glad to hear this different message.

So there's the sinners. And we'll see how they come to be included in the story. But then there's also the third group. There's the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, isn't there? And they're muttering. We see them often complaining and grumbling about Jesus.

They would be regarded by themselves, certainly, but also by others, as the insiders, morally, upright, socially, at the top of the tree, religiously seen to be the best of the best.

If you were to ask them the question, have you passed the test of God's law? Have you been righteous so that God would accept you? They would say yes. Jesus has a different answer, but they would say yes.

And Jesus takes these himself and the tax collector of sinners and the Pharisees and the teachers of the law and he includes them in the stories. Now, some interesting points to notice about these stories.

[8 : 55] First one, you may not have sort of put two and two together with this. Jesus shares the joy of heaven. Jesus' mission, verse two, is to welcome sinners and to eat with them.

And Jesus does that gladly. Jesus does that joyfully. And that connects with the point of his story. So, verse seven, I tell you, in the same way, there'll be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 who don't need to.

Verse 10, I tell you, there's rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. When Jesus welcomes sinners, heaven has joy.

The joy of Jesus is the joy of God. The actions of Jesus are the actions of God and they lead to joy in heaven. The point implied Jesus is God and he's doing the will of God as he welcomes, saves sinners.

And that brings him joy. It brings heaven joy. Another thing that is important for us to notice about these stories is that Jesus writes himself into his own stories.

[10 : 02] You'll sometimes find that with film directors. We were watching an old Hitchcock movie, To Catch a Thief, and there was a scene where Cary Grant was at the back of a bus and who was sitting beside him.

It was Alfred Hitchcock, the director, making a cameo appearance. Well, where is Jesus in the stories he tells? He is the central figure. You read about this seeking shepherd, you need to think about Jesus.

Think about this determined woman who's seeking carefully for the lost coin, you need to think about Jesus. And the loving father who throws a feast for the lost son, that's Jesus.

And the point is, each of those characters ends up with joy. Joy. Jesus is showing us his heart as he tells these stories.

The theme of our stories reveal joy. Now, normally, perhaps, if we were to be asked, what are these stories about? What are these stories about?

[11 : 00] We might say, well, they are about things that are lost, that then are found. And that's, of course, vital. But we also want to make sure that we see that when Jesus puts the emphasis on joy, that we see that as well.

That we see that the emphasis on celebration and joy when something that is lost is found. Because at the centre of the good news is the seeking love of God.

When we think about the joy in the stories, we're giving glory to God because we see the love of God in Jesus in rescuing, saving sinners.

So don't miss the joy of Jesus at the heart of Christianity. There is always a danger that God is misrepresented in our words or in our thoughts.

That we can think about God as being less than generous. That we can think of God as less than kind. Or, on the other hand, we can undervalue, take for granted the love of God.

[12 : 15] Whereas here, in the stories of Jesus, and especially when we think about the lost son, we see the wonder of the love of God that he would save sinful people like us.

There is the wonder of Christmas that we rightly celebrate God becoming one of us. But we tie that together with the wonder of the cross. That Jesus, the perfect son of God, willingly and joyfully came to die for sinners.

He came to take our place, to be counted among sinful people. And that by faith in Jesus, we could be counted righteous and brought home to God.

Though by rights, we should be separated from God, judged by him for all eternity. Now, let's shift for a moment from Jesus to the audience that Jesus has of use.

Remember, there's the tax collectors and the sinners and the Pharisees and the teachers of law. Now, Jesus tells the stories to make clear to both groups. One point.

[13 : 28] All people are sinners. Regardless of who we are, all of us are sinners. In our thoughts and our words and our actions, we do not perfectly obey God's commands.

We do not perfectly match God's standards. We do not perfectly love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And we do not love our neighbour as ourselves.

We may have some days that are better than others, but we never have a perfect day and we absolutely never have a perfect life. So we are, by nature and by our actions, sinners.

And Jesus speaks to an audience who have very different views. So the guys that are called sinners, well, they know this because they're hearing people call them that all the time.

They are kept at a distance because they seem to be unclean. Whoa, stay away from them. They're bad news. Jesus doesn't do that, of course. They were living in a system where they were told that to be close to God, you had to keep a set of rules and they were failing miserably.

[14 : 38] And this is what happens when you have religion without Jesus, religion without God's grace. When you have a system that's based on your own goodness or your own effort, you'll have one group that's full of pride and they're really judgmental.

And another group like these tax collectors who are despairing because they know they're never good enough and they're never presented with real hope. But Jesus, he brings hope.

Unlike all the false religion of Jesus day and around the world, Jesus and Jesus alone brings hope. B.B. Warfield, an old American theologian said, A sinner may be too vile, horrible, for any and everything else, but he cannot be too vile for salvation.

Because our salvation is not about our goodness. It's all about God's goodness, God's grace and kindness in sending Jesus.

So Jesus speaks to the sinners and he will say to them through the stories, you are the lost sheep, you are the lost coin and you are the lost son, the younger son.

[16 : 00] But he does that in such a way that gives them hope. So let's look, boys and girls, look with me at the details in our Bible passage.

Look, for example, at verse number 12. How does this younger son treat his father? He says, So he treats his father in a shameful way, saying, Dad, I can't wait till you're dead.

I want my share of the money now. He treats his father in a really destructive way because the dad probably has to sell off some of the family land. He finds himself much more poor at the hands of his son.

And then this son goes off and lives recklessly. He lives a wild life, lives an immoral life, spends all the money. Interesting detail in verse 13, we're told he set off for a distant country, sometimes known as a far country.

And for people who knew their Bibles and Jesus' audience probably did know their Bibles, when they hear far country, they might think, for example, of when Adam and Eve had been in the Garden of Eden, but when they sinned, they were sent out of the Garden.

[17 : 22] Or when the people of God had been living in Israel, but then because of their sin, they were sent away out of the country. They were sent into exile in the far country.

So that image of being in a distant or a far place is an idea of being far from God. Boys and girls, look at verse 15 and we'll find this young son's job.

So a famine comes and he's desperately in need. So he goes to work on a pig farm. And in verse 16, he longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating.

Now, to a Jewish person, pigs were unclean animals. So he has made himself unclean by working with them. And he has fallen so low in his life that he even wants to eat what the pigs are eating.

He is lost. And yet, our theme, the lost can be found. The lost is found.

[18 : 23] And as his story goes, and we'll think about it shortly, there is a movement for him from the far country to home, isn't there? And when he comes home, he is treated with honour and his father meets him with joy.

And this is a reminder that Jesus brings that there is no hole so deep, there is no place that we can go that is so awful that God's love can't reach.

Our hope is that in Jesus we have a saviour who loves to save sinners and he is strong and mighty to save. So there is no one who is beyond hope.

So he brings that message to those tax collectors and those known as sinners. But remember the other audience? There's also the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

The ones who said, of course we are God's people. Of course we are the good guys. But here's the thing about these Pharisees. We see them all through their life as they are fighting with Jesus.

[19 : 32] They hate it. I absolutely hate it when Jesus shows the grace and kindness of God to others. Always complaining. And another thing about them, they don't see their need of forgiveness.

They're like the people who think that they're righteous so they don't need to repent. They don't need to turn away from sin to God. So they're proud. They're full of their own self-importance. They're very self-righteous.

And Jesus tells these stories with a real sting in the tail. I want to see, I want us to see that these Pharisees are in each of the three stories. But Jesus is building up towards what we might call a sting in the tail.

So you can imagine them as they hear the first story. There's a hundred sheep and one gets lost. We wouldn't be the lost ones. So we must be the ninety-nine who are safe. Or the parable of the ten silver coins and one goes missing.

Well, of course, we are good. So we don't go missing. So we're the nine who are safe. And then Jesus starts telling a story about a father with two sons and one son goes wild.

[20 : 39] And so they're thinking, yeah, we're the good son that stays at home. But what's the punchline in the story? It's the so-called good son who stays at home who ends up being lost.

Here Jesus is saying, you can be in the father's house, but you can be every bit as lost as the reckless, wretched son living in the pigsty.

You can be close to home. You can be close to home and yet far from home. If you don't know your father's heart and you've never experienced that sense of your own need to be forgiven and to receive grace.

The theme of seeking love that's there in the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin is also here in this parable. But notice the seeking is for the older brother, the one who probably never thought he had a problem in the first place.

So again, boys and girls, look at verse 28. The older brother has now heard that the younger son is home and the dad's having a party.

[21 : 53] The elder brother became angry and refused to go in. So what does his father do? His father went out and pleaded with him. He is seeking love.

And even when he answers his dad badly, showing he doesn't understand his father's heart. Verse 31. 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. Jesus, one at the same time, explodes their pride.

You think you're safe, but actually you're lost. You think you're righteous, but actually you're a sinner. But at the same time, he is pleading with them to receive the invitation to be forgiven, to know God's grace and to be brought home.

Because everybody is a sinner in God's eyes. So to go back to their accusation. Verse 2. Remember the accusation, the muttering of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law.

[23 : 00] This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. This is actually good news. And they need to understand this is good news. This is the only hope for all people. Though we do not deserve God's kindness, Jesus joyfully is ready to welcome us and invite us home to God.

Now let's go back to Jesus' portrait of himself, his self-portrait in these stories. Because they help to answer the question, what is God like?

Is God mean-spirited or is God generous? Let God, let the Bible, let Jesus answer the question for us. And what we discover in these stories is a joyful, generous, gracious God who loves to save sinners.

And one way of showing this are the exaggerated details. Now boys and girls, I want you to see this and to think about this. Because I know you get invitations to parties.

Now maybe not recently, but normally you get invitations to parties. So think about invitations. The stories begin with normal details. You can imagine if you've got a hundred sheep, it's quite normal that one might go missing.

[24 : 17] Or if you've got ten coins, you might expect that one might go missing. That seems quite normal. But here's the bit that's not normal, and we're supposed to notice this. It's not normal to throw a party when you find a lost sheep.

It's not normal to invite your neighbours, to invite the community to come and celebrate. Because you find a lost coin. This should grab us. We get invitations for some things, but I'm going to guess you've never had a party invitation because a friend found something that they'd lost.

Probably not. And the reaction, in a sense, seems really over the top. But not when we understand that it's a picture for us of God's seeking love.

When we see it as a picture of Jesus' joy and heaven's joy in the lost being found. It's a sign of just how great God's love and kindness is to a lost world.

The other religious leaders, the Pharisees and the tax collectors, the ones who are muttering that Jesus is showing grace and forgiveness and a welcome, they kind of remind me of the Grinch.

[25 : 38] I don't know if you've read the Grinch or watched the Grinch who stole Christmas. Well, the Grinch was really miserable, wasn't he, in the face of joy and happiness when he saw the Whos in Whoville having a great time.

And Dr. Seuss says, speculates, perhaps it's because his heart was two sizes too small. Well, that's certainly true of the Pharisees. Their heart for other people is too small.

Their heart is too small to receive God's love and God's forgiveness because they think they don't need it. And they pictured God having a small heart and being really judgmental and not being generous with his grace.

And maybe we can do that too. Maybe there are some people that we write off as saying, God won't be interested in that kind of person. But the truth from Jesus is that when we trust in Jesus as Saviour, heaven is full of joy.

Regardless of who we are, if we trust in Jesus, heaven rejoices. And in case we miss that theme, let's see the exuberant joy of the Father in our story.

[26 : 54] So remember, the younger son who comes to his senses, realising, here I am in a pigsty and I'm starving to death. I should go home. And as he goes home, this shameful, stinking, rebel son returns.

Verse 20. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son through his arms around him and kissed him. So we see the love, the compassion, the joy.

We see the best homecoming party ever. However, the prodigal son is welcome with open arms. No expense is spared.

Boys and girls, look at the details of what he's given. The best robe. Verse 22. What else is there? There's a ring on his fingers, sandals on his feet.

And then no expense is spared. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. No honour is held back. Joy overflows.

[27 : 58] And this is a picture of Jesus. This is a picture of God's heart when spiritually lost, spiritually dead men and women and boys and girls are found by God's grace.

Are made alive by God's grace. Because Jesus has joy in saving sinners. And this, this is the coming of unbreakable joy. Why? Sometimes when we read stories, I guess we identify with one character more than another.

Who are you in this story? In a sense, it doesn't matter because whoever you are, Jesus is teaching, wherever you are, whether you're in the pigsty, feeling ashamed, whether you're at home, but feeling sort of legalistic and proud.

The message is the same, that we are sinners, but we have a saviour who loves to save sinners, who came into the world to save sinners. So whoever we are, we are called to trust him today.

To trust that when he died on the cross, he was taking my sin and my shame and paying the penalty and facing the punishment that I deserve, so that by looking to him and trusting in him, I can be forgiven and have eternal life.

[29 : 13] That we can know his joy as ours by faith in him. And for those of us who are already Christians, for those of us who are part of the church, let the joy of Jesus be our joy.

Let it be our hope to see how great God's grace is, so that we'd have hope for ourself and we'd also have hope as we pray for others. And that the joy of Jesus and his gladly coming to be saviour, that would be our story, it would be our testimony, that would be the message we would share with the world.

Now, we've seen the joy of Jesus in saving sinners. I wouldn't see the cost that Jesus joyfully paid to save sinners.

Very briefly, this is one last but massive truth to draw from Jesus as he pictures himself as the loving father in this story. So remember, back at the beginning, we read Hebrews 12.

Fix your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy, here's our word, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame. And what Hebrews is saying, and what Luke 15 prepares us for, is that Jesus will joyfully pay the price so that lost, spiritually lost people can be found, so that sinners can be saved.

[30 : 33] Now, how do we see it in the story? We see it because we have a father who bears the cost in the lost son coming home. There's pictures of the cross here.

We see costly grace. The father bears the cost in giving the son what he doesn't deserve. As the son is honoured and welcomed, the father is having to bear in himself shame.

And remember that at the cross, what's Jesus doing? Jesus is bearing shame for us. Jesus is taking the curse of God for sinners so that we can be honoured, so that we might know God's blessing.

The lost son in our story, coming back filthy and in rags, he's clothed with honour, which is a wonderful picture of what Jesus does for us at the cross.

Jesus, we know, we know would be stripped and disgraced at the cross. As part of this great exchange where he takes our sin so that by faith in Jesus, we are clothed in his righteousness.

[31 : 52] In our story, we see the most valuable thing that the father has, is killed, is given, the fattened calf. And Jesus came to give himself, to give his own life as a sacrifice so that sinners like you and like me can be welcomed as children of God by trusting in him.

So remember, Jesus endured the cross joyfully, knowing it would accomplish salvation. And know that today, if you're not a Christian, Jesus pleads with you to come home to him, to find joy in him.

So will you have faith in Jesus? Trust that he will not reject you if you come to him, but rather he will welcome and love you and bring you home to God.

He would have joy in saving you. Ask him to be your saviour. Ask him to be your saviour.

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