

# Grumbling on earth, but joy in heaven

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Preacher: Matthew Brennan

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Ezekiel chapter 34 from verse 1. The word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel.

! Prophesy and say to them, this is what the sovereign Lord says. Woe to you shepherds of Israel who only take care of yourselves. Should not shepherds take care of the flock?

You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with wool in slaughter, the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed those who are ill or bound up the injured.

You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered, they became food for all the wild animals.

My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.

[ 1 : 0 7 ] Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord, as surely as I live, declares the sovereign Lord. because my flocks lack a shepherd, and so has been planted and has become food for all the wild animals.

And because my shepherds did not search for my flock, but cared for themselves rather than for my flock. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord.

This is what the sovereign Lord says. I am against the shepherds, and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock, so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves.

I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. For this is what the sovereign Lord says. I myself will search for my sheep, and look after them.

As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock, when he is with them, so I will look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places they were scattered on the day of the clouds and darkness.

[ 2 : 1 9 ] This is God's word to us. Thank you, Bianca. And thank you again for the invitation, for the second invitation to be with you, and bring God's word. McCurtain Street holds much affection in my heart, not just that we gave you your recent minister, but as I was reminded earlier, I preached here as a boy.

That was not yesterday. That was a few years ago, and I didn't realize that there were still folk around who remembered those occasions. So, it's doubly delightful to be with you this morning.

The text I want to look at is in Luke. It's chapter 15. It's the three losses. The loss of a coin, the loss of a sheep, and the loss of a son.

Bianca's reading was very important because the context of these parables, these stories, come from the first two verses of the chapter. And for the first two verses read, Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathered around him to hear him.

But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, muttered, This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. That's the context. And it's from that incident that these stories unfold.

[ 3 : 35 ] And the Lord is going to illustrate the need for people and the seeking nature of God himself. There was a lady called Edith.

She was not a church-going woman. She was in her apartment one morning on a Sunday, and she was discontent and disillusioned, and she went out, and she walked out of her apartment down the street, and walked into a church.

The reading that morning was Luke 15, and it was from the authorized version. And this is what the passage says.

It says, Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them.

Now Edith heard this. Edith heard this man receiveth sinners and eateth with them. And she sat bolt upright in the seat.

[ 4 : 44 ] And as the service unfolded, she realized she had misunderstood. But she stayed. She stayed. And it was the beginning of Edith's journey to coming to a living faith in Jesus.

I'll read the chapter, and then we will turn to it briefly and see if we can glean from it. We'll pick up at verse 3. 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 and 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 neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me.

I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way, there will be more rejoicing heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

[ 5 : 47 ] 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?

And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me, for 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. Not long after that, the young man, the younger son got together all he had, set out for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in 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 field to feed pigs.

[ 7 : 01 ] He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he had come to his senses, he said, How many of my father's hired men 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 men.

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.

And 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. 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 fatted calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead, and he's alive again.

[ 8 : 09 ] He was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate. Meanwhile, the older brother was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.

So he called to one of his servants and asked him, What was going on? Your brother has come, he replied, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has him back safe and sound.

The older 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 even gave me a goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes come home, you'd kill the fatted 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.

[ 9 : 19 ] He was lost and is found. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, this was our status.

All we like sheep have gone astray. Each one has turned to his own way and we were lost. We were lost.

We were without hope and without God in the world. We were in night's darkness. And the great shepherd of the sheep left the glories of heaven to seek and to save that which was lost.

And he searched diligently until he found us. And he found us in different places and different circumstances and at different ages. But the son that was lost and the daughter that was lost is found.

And the rejoicing has gone on from then to now. But this morning as we gather, Father, there may be even some amongst us this day who are in that wilderness state.

[ 10 : 25 ] They may not go as far physically or morally but in their hearts they're lost. And it's our fervent prayer that you would bless the believer and that you'd seek and save the lost even this day.

Not just here but across the length and breadth of our country. Hear our prayer we humbly pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Writers and commentators say that this chapter is the best loved of all the chapters in the scriptures.

Leon Morris says this is one of the best known and best loved chapters of the Bible. Three parables bringing out the joy of God when the sinner is found.

As I said to you verse 1 and 2 are the context. And from that initial response by the Pharisees and the Sadducees Jesus gives a parable.

Three parables actually. And if you read it when you're doing your Bible reading always look to see what's repeated. No matter how long or how short the passage is as you're reading it read it with intelligence.

[ 11 : 36 ] Use your use your brain as you engage and see what words are repeated. In this story there are two words repeated eight times. Do you get them?

You did. Lost What was the second? Rejoicing. Rejoicing. There was loss and there was rejoicing.

Yes. Those words are repeated three times eight times in this story in this chapter. We read Ezekiel 34 and you could see something of the disposition that the Pharisees and the scribes had towards ordinary people.

They were not looking after them. They were not the sheep. They were not the shepherds of the flock that God had given. And God himself says I will come and seek and I will be their shepherd.

But there were particular classes of people that the Pharisees and scribes did not like. tax collectors and sinners. A sinner was just any ordinary man or woman.

[ 12 : 46 ] They weren't sort of vilely immoral. It was just ordinary men and women. But they didn't like the tax collectors. A. Because the nation was an occupied country and the Jewish men were taking gathering the money for the invader and filling their coffers.

But not only that they were filling their own coffers. And they were usually very prosperous. Remember the illustration of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus. He was a tax selector.

And when he came to faith he says Lord I will give back all I have robbed from people. All the excessive tax I took I will give it back. So there were a despised segment of the community.

There's always segments of our community that are despised. I've got one or two in my own head that I'm not particularly fond of and I'm sure you may have one or two in your head that you're not particularly fond of but that's the idea.

That's the idea. These tax collectors were the despised people of the day. And Jesus gives these three stories. A sheep, a coin, and a son.

[ 13 : 58 ] And as he begins to speak the value of the lost thing becomes more valuable. One sheep out of a hundred you won't starve.

One kind out of ten you won't go broke. One son out of two very valuable. So he uses these stories to speak of something that is lost.

And three things happen in each of the stories. There's a loss, there's a persistent search, and there's delightful joy. There's a loss, the persistent search, and the delightful joy.

Whether it's the shepherd with his sheep, or the woman with her coin, or the father with his son. I want to focus on the last of the three, three, of the two brothers.

And the youngest son came to his dad one day, and he says, I know I'm going to get an inheritance. Mind you, at the rate we are living, I don't think our children are going to get our inheritance, but anyway, he says, give me what will come to me if you are dead.

[ 15 : 18 ] In other words, I don't want to wait. I don't want to wait. As a matter of fact, I wish you were dead. Then I'd get my inheritance.

Now he's crass. He is crass. He comes to his father and he says that. Alexander White says, I want my money and I want it now. He says, it was a heartless speech, but secret visions of sin will soon harden the tenderest heart in the world.

I thought that was a very powerful statement. Alexander says, Alexander White, it was a heartless speech, but secret visions of sin will soon harden the tenderest heart in the world.

A parent knows that. They've been trying to show their children the Christian faith. Notice I said show, not teach. There's all the difference in the world between teaching and showing.

Children see you by what you do, not by what you say. So there are parents who have tried to teach their children the Christian faith, but the child does not take it in. Because the child sees a dichotomy between the saying and the doing.

[ 16 : 38 ] But even if children see their parents doing the faith, there is that little rebellious streak in their heart and the children, and the parents spot it very early, and they don't want it to get harder.

They don't want it to harden. But they see the process of sin taking its effect in their little lives, and they see how whenever they try to talk to them about Jesus and sin and salvation, they see the eyes, they see the shutters going down on the eyes, and the don't bother me expression on the face.

sin. That's what sin does. It does it to our youngest, it does it to us all. But this young man wanted, he says, I want to forget you all. I want to get away, I want to find myself, I want to be myself, I don't want any remnants of my family, I want the high life and I want it now.

So he wanted to get away. And he wanted to get as far and as fast as he could. And he went to the far country. Now the far country doesn't necessarily have to be geographical.

It's in your head. You don't have to go anywhere to be in the far country. You could be sitting here this morning but you're in the far country. And the far country is a place where God and his light and his blessing and his presence are no longer you're aware of them.

[ 18 : 10 ] you don't desire nor delight nor want it. That's the far country. And this young man wanted to go to the far country.

And he went and he went and we realized within a short time he lost everything.

mind. He lost his mind. He lost his body. He lost his soul. He lost his inheritance. He lost everything. He is bankrupt.

He is hungry. And he ultimately is alone. Alone. Now I said he lost his mind and his body because God has made us for himself.

and every faculty he has given you, brain or brawn, skill or not skill, all of those things are God's good gifts to you to be used for his glory and your good.

[ 19 : 16 ] I don't know what this boy's education was. He may have been better educated than the ordinary man and woman, but he squandered it. he spent his father's inheritance, he lived a blatantly godless life and then things got bad.

His drinking buddies stopped calling, the girls in the street didn't want to see him anymore and he is alone. He's alone.

And you know, every believer has to be alone. Every sinner has to be alone before they meet Jesus. There is that one-on-one encounter where you realize who you are and what you've done and who you've done it against.

And you say to this great God, this searching Savior, God be merciful to me, a sinner. It's a one-on-one encounter.

How long is in this state? Jesus doesn't tell us. But verse 17 says he came to his senses. He says when he came to his senses he said, here am I, I'm shoeless and without food, without friend, and I don't even want to eat what the pigs are getting, but that's all I have.

[ 20 : 38 ] And then he thinks back on his farm and his bedroom and the house and the smell of cooking and the servants and clean water and a bed.

And he says, I am here wasting away, I am perishing, I'm lost, while even my father's servants enjoy a better life than me. He comes to his senses.

He thinks over what he's done and how far he's gone and then we all do this. When you're young you do this. You make up a story, you have a little story, if you do something wrong, you rehearse something so that when your mum asks you about it, you say, oh, this, this, that, that happened.

Well, here's his story. He thinks of what he's going to say to his father and he says, he repeats this, he tells us, where does he start and tell us about it? He says, he says, Father, yes, it's up in verse 18, he says, I will set out and go back to my father and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son, make me as one of your hired servants.

So he rehearses it and rehearses it and rehearses it and he begins to begin the journey home. He knows what he's going to say to his dad when he gets home.

[ 22 : 03 ] He has rehearsed his shame, his guilt, his confession and he starts down the road and he repeats it to himself, I am no longer worthy, he says.

I'll go to my father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. And as he begins that journey homewards, there's been a man in the house who's gone to yon window, gone to yon door and looked down the road, day after day after day.

And he wonders, where is my boy? And he wonders what he's doing? And he wonders what's become of him? And on this particular day, as the man looks, look what it says about the father in verse 20, it says, in verse 20.

So he got up and went to his father, but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His father saw him.

He's away in the distance like a little fist, and he begins, the father can begin to recognize the gait and the movement of the boy. and even in the distance, his searching eye has seen.

[ 23 : 43 ] He was a long way off, his father saw him. What's the father's response? Verse 20, he was filled with compassion for him.

He was filled with compassion for him. There are a lot of verbs in the father's actions. Notice it says, he saw him, was filled, ran through and kissed him.

We've all seen those incidents at Christmas when families come home. It's a bit embarrassing. You know, watching poor people crying their eyes out when they're welcoming back a son or a daughter or a husband or a wife, and some of them just throw themselves on the other person.

You almost think that the person is going to keel over because they put so much weight on them. That's what the father does. He throws himself on the son and he kisses him and he hugs him and the son begins to give the rehearsed speech and the father cuts him dead in the middle of it.

Did you see that? He says, the son said to him in verse 21, father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But 22, the father said to the servants, quick.

[ 25 : 02 ] He didn't get to finish his little speech. The father interrupted him and he says, quick, get a ring, get sandals, get clothes, kill the fatted calf.

Kill the fatted calf. There's no lecture or punishment. There's no you deserve it, you're a disgrace. In that community, the son should be dead to the father.

He should not recognize him. He's dead to the father. He's done something, he's brought great shame, he's brought great disgrace on the family. And in the Jewish society, the community would watch to see how will the father respond to this profligate son.

And he should be dead socially. But what the father does he takes the shame. He takes the disgrace by welcoming the son back.

So that when the community look at this father they say he's a disgrace. He should be ashamed of himself welcoming that fellow back. That's what God does for us.

[ 26 : 25 ] He bore our sin in his own body on the tree. By his stripes we are healed. He is despised and rejected but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

So when people say there's no gospel there's no presentation of salvation or propitiation or sacrifice it's all in the story. The dignity of the father now is in ruins because he's so extravagant.

this is not done. As a matter of fact the searching God of our faith is the only religion in the world where God goes searching for the lost.

None other religion does it. God doesn't sit in his ivory tower for you and I to come to himself. No. He goes seeking for us.

He goes searching for us. And this boy learned in the far country what misery was like. When he returned home he discovered what mercy was like.

[ 27 : 36 ] What mercy was like. The father has taken the disgrace that his son brought to the family and the father bears the shame.

Stephen Ford was the son of Betty Ford one of the wives of the American presidents and when she died he says this she was the one with the love and the comfort and she was the first one there to put her arms around you.

He says 19 years ago when I went through my alcoholism my mother gave me one of the greatest gifts and that is how to surrender to God and in her arms I felt like the prodigal son coming home I felt God's love through her and that was a good gift so the son is blown away by the father's extraordinary grace and love the music starts the wine is uncorked the calf is on the spit there is everything delightful and the son comes in from the field and that's the conclusion that's the apex of the parable that's what the whole parable is about it began with the pharisees and scribes in the first verses and now here's the older brother one of the same cloth he's got the same pharisaical spirit as the ones in verses 1 and 2 he comes in from the field this law abiding morally upright alien son he believed his righteousness was superior he believed that he was a better man and when he hears what the father has done for the profligate he has anger in his heart notice how he describes him this son of yours this son of yours who spent your fortune on prostitutes and harlots and drunkards this son of yours not my brother not mine and he wouldn't come in he wouldn't share in his father's joy he wouldn't share in the moment of the son's restoration no that's not for him his morality was self righteousness he was he believed he was right and he was in a good place without ever realizing he too needed the love of the father and the forgiveness of the father just like the other brother but no the proud and the self righteous think they're superior to everyone else and they're not but there was no persuading him there was no persuading him to come in no matter what the father said he wasn't coming in but notice what the father says in verse 32 he says we had to celebrate

I'm compelled to be joyful he says he says because this your brother who was dead is alive was lost and is found there's joy in heaven when the prodigal comes home but you don't have to go far away to get away from God you can be away from him now you can be away from him now the family put the following lost and found in their local newspaper lost a dog crippled in the front paw blind in the left eye mange on the back in the neck tail missing recently neutered goes by the name of lucky he truly was a lucky dog because even though he was lost there was someone who loved him and wanted him back now the

Pharisees at the beginning of the story one sheep for them that's okay coin for them that's okay profitable son not on not on Jesus says to the Pharisees and he says to you and me this morning are you and I of much more value than a sheep or a coin or a dog we're of great value because God seeks those who are lost and that is each and every one of us do you hear him seeking you have you heard his call are you still in the far country are you still resisting him are you still saying I will be my own man I will be my own woman I will do my own thing it's a pathway to death it's a pathway to death but let me say as I conclude the entire city of Cork is lost there are so few in the church by comparison to the thousands who were outside the church there there are thousands and thousands and thousands on the streets every day and are lost what are you doing for your city what are you doing to reach them granted we may not all be gifted to evangelize but are you praying are you pleading for the spirit of

[ 33 : 24 ] God to come and seek and save the lost are you encouraging those who are endeavouring to witness for Jesus in this society whether it's in the universities or whether it's on the streets the majority of mankind around Cork this morning are lost they've taken the train and the bus and the car to Dublin this morning the city's half empty and they get excited about a bit of leather going through the air and they hope they'll be temporary I really don't care but they're all lost without the saviour there'll be more joy in heaven today than all the cheers in Crow Park if someone comes to faith that's a cause of celebration let's pray ask yourself am I saved or found am I lost and if you're lost then do what the prodigal did here turn back to God and say father

I have sinned against heaven and against you and he will make you one of his own precious children! and for those of us who know the old old story may it still be ever new that the son of man came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost we thank you Lord Jesus that you're in the finding business there are husbands and there are wives this morning of this congregation and there are sons and daughters and brothers and sisters who are lost and Lord Jesus we give you their names we mention them to you in the hope that you might as you're searching and seeking that you might seek them out and that you might find them for Lord if you don't we're in despair but we thank you we thank you Lord Jesus that you came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost find today those whom we love we humbly pray for

Jesus sake Amen