Luke 15:1-10 Early Morning

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Preacher: Rev. James Wagner

[0:00] Well, the Great Reversal is the name of this sermon series, and it just keeps coming in Luke chapter 13 through 17, and we touch down in chapter 15 today, which is an oh-so-familiar one to us.

Maybe a little bit too familiar, but today's big reversal, as our sermon series suggests, is the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes to that of Jesus and the sinners and the tax collectors.
Through the shepherd, the woman, and the father, the Pharisees and the Sadducees are grumbling. That word may sound familiar to you, that we're told about them, just like those when they were in the wilderness in the book of Exodus.
Well, Jesus, by contrast, is full of joy, calling those to repentance. The key or hinge of the difference is this.
The gospel of grace inducing rejoicing through repentance is a miraculous actually turn towards God because of his spectacular generosity and compassion.
[1:13] It's all about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But in preparing for this message, the reading of these three things for me generated three questions. And one is, is this a neglect of the vulnerable, the first parable?

The second one, is this just a waste of time? And then the third one, is there a shameful display of affection here? Maybe this is a shock to even ask these questions.
But we're so familiar with these parables about the lost and the found, that sometimes we forget the shock that it must have been, certainly to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and also the reversal to those who are also standing and listening as well.
So let's look at these three questions. One is of neglect, another one of waste, and maybe the other one, shamefulness. So the first question is this.
Is this a neglect of the vulnerable? This is the first one that I know we're familiar with, about the sheep and the lost one. Interestingly, in these three parables, you have a hundred sheep, one lost, you have a ton of coins, one lost, and then you have two sons, both lost.
[2:29] But here we are. Jesus starts with a question of his own. 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?

Question, how would you answer that? Would you say, no, because I'm not going to risk the other ninety-nine? Or would you say, yes, because, well, the ninety-nine are safe, or I can't bear to sacrifice that one to a wolf?
The shepherd's love for one sheep is unquantifiable. The shepherd is the first responder to the threat of this one sheep.
The shepherd, also known as the great shepherd, or the son of God, personally takes action. He doesn't send one of his hired people to go and look after this one sheep, but he himself is the one that goes, pursues this one sheep that is lost.
This great theme in these three parables. The one who is lost is then found and rescued. And in this case, we learn the contrast between the grumbling Pharisees' scribes and Jesus who goes after those who they have issue with, being the tax collectors and sinners, like a shepherd who goes after this one lost sheep.
[3:56] They are the great shepherd's aim, his target, his focus. The tax collectors and sinners are, for some reason, attracted, attached to Jesus, the good shepherd, has this uncalculated affinity and unnerving association for them.

And the result of this rescue operation is joy induction. It silences the Pharisees and the scribes in their critical and their contemptuous view of Jesus.

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They are probably aghast that a shepherd would risk the safety of 99 sheep. Maybe they could accuse Jesus of neglect of the 99, until he states, No neglect there.
But what about a waste of time? We can all identify with the next parable of a lost coin if we can't with a lost sheep, because who of us are shepherds? We all lose money, coins, bills, right?
And it seems like technology actually hasn't delivered what it's promised to make us feel secure there. Do you feel or think that your money or investments or finances are more or less secure than they were in the years gone by?
[5:24] That's not the question I've raised, though. It's, was this woman's effort a waste of time? She lost one of ten coins and takes time to find this one coin, but not all.

What does she do with her time? I don't know if you noticed this when we read through this, but as I did this week. But there are three things that she does, which is a little bit different than what the shepherd does up in verses 4 and 5.
Those three things that he does is to leave, go, and lay, which I didn't spend time on. But the three things that the woman does, if you look down in verse 8, is that she lights, she sweeps, and she seeks.
Charles Spurgeon expounds and interprets these three parables really winsomely. He says that the shepherd represents the Son of God on his work to rescue the lost, which seems kind of obvious. But the woman is like the church filled with the Holy Spirit, inspired and animated by the same. And about the lost coin, like the tax collectors and sinners, so the woman is strategic in her search.
[6:44] She doesn't go straight to seeking, though, the lost coin. If I lose a coin or money or my wallet, you may have had that experience, I just start looking, panickingly, seeking and searching and kind of scouring.

Isn't that what we all do when we lose something? But it's a little bit different here with the tax collectors and the sinners, those who are the hated ones by the righteous, who don't want to hear anything about their repentance.
And in fact, they may just want them to go away. So, the church, like the woman here, lights a lamp, sweeps the floor, and then seeks for the coin.
She's strategic about finding the lost coin and setting the stage for repentance and rejoicing. And so, the church, like the woman, is not wasting time because no coin or person is a waste of time. In fact, it would be a waste of time not to plan for the work of the Word, which may be the lamp, and the work of discipleship and fellowship, which is like the sweeping away, or as Jim Packer called it, kind of plumbing, making things clear and clean so the Word of God can come through.
[8:10] So, this is the purposeful work of the Christian and the church. When we do this with intention by the grace of God, then we enjoy and glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, this is the work of the Spirit through the church and in his people. The coin or tax collectors, the sinners, are not a waste of time, no matter what, and they're certainly worth searching for and finding.
So, not a waste of time. Now, the next one is this kind of a shameful display of affection. Finally, this parable that we all know, right? The most famous verse in Scripture may be chapter 3 of John, verse 16.
The most famous Psalm, Shirley 23. The most famous stories, the birth, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But this has got to be the most well-known parable, don't you think?
If the first parable features the Son of God, the second, the Spirit of God in the church, then the third, this one is very clear, too, about the Father. It starts out with a man with two sons, in other words, a father.
[9:23] You all know the story, though. Time doesn't permit me now to exposit this, sadly, because there's so much to revisit in this. But it's this display of affection that the Father has for his son, the shameful one.

The Father is more affectionate than we can even begin to ask or imagine. It's my takeaway. The youngest son starts out with, Give me, if you look down in verse 12, And the younger man said to his father, Father, give me the share of property.
And he ends with, Make me, or treat me. Verse 19, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me. The eldest son, though it's not explicit, I think it's implicit, he says, looking at his brother, What kind of fool is he?

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And he ends with now, What kind of fool am I? The father starts out with, Kind of, Have your own way. And in the end, it's like, Have my way.
And after the youngest son, like Jacob, you know, of the Old Testament, the swindler and usurper that he is, shamefully cashes out his inheritance. And after ending up in bankruptcy, just spiritually and financially, he literally, which isn't actually said here, comes to himself.
[10:41] Not just his senses. As the whole parable suggests, not only has he lost his morals and his money, but his whole manner of being. And the shame of it all, there's something else that looks shameful.

The father waiting with patience, not passively, as if all the time longing for the return of his son, sees the son coming from a distance.
It's a little bit like Psalm 33, where we read in that psalm, that prayer, the Lord looks down from heaven. He sees the children of man.
This father sees his son coming. And Jesus tells us in this parable that the father didn't do three things, like the woman and the shepherd, but four things.
He saw. He felt. He ran. And he kissed. In the other parables, you know, these other front and center kind of figures are doing something different but similar, but there's something really compelling in this one, isn't there?
[11:55] This father's affection, which comes through in this feelings, this compassion from the gut. But it's not just affection. There's this action, this urgency, when we see him running to his son.

And then, of course, there's this adoration, this covering with kisses. There's some suggestion that the reason that he ran and covered his son was actually to protect him from others when they saw him actually coming back because of the shame that he would have brought on his father.
But then there's this kissing of him, this covering of him, protecting him. And so the father covers the sin of the son outwardly, not just inwardly, with words.
And that's the grace of God. He covers our sin. He doesn't control us. The spirit is there to keep us from it in the first place, though. But he lavishes his love on us.
And is this shameful for God to show this kind of adoration and affection, this action of God for his children? Well, I think the answer is no.
[13:12] But it's quite different than, isn't it, the view of the Pharisees and the scribes' view of God. Even different than the Greek view of the God at the time. Because no God stoops down like ours.

to do this for his children. As he covers our sin. He frees us from our traps. He loosens us from all the tangles of sin. Now this isn't shameful.
This is saving. So Jesus tells us these three perils. After the Pharisees and the scribes take issue with this teacher. But Jesus is more than a teacher.
Now he's a savior. Lives of the tax collectors and sinners are not academic or theoretical to Jesus. They're not problems to be solved.
They're people to be saved. Because they're lost. And now found. And I think that we can all identify with this. Lost and then found. John Newton knew this.
[14:13] It's part of the reason why he wrote the song Amazing Grace. Knowing that he was once lost and now found. And Fanny Crosby also wrote a hymn based on these parables. It was called Oh the Joy That Fills My Heart.

The second line of the refrain reads like this. Lost but found. Oh happy strain. Dead but now. I live again. Lost but found.
Oh happy strain. Dead but now. I live again. So today's thanksgiving or harvest and a fitting response to the worship of God who seeks and saves the lost is definitely gratitude.
I know today is about thanksgiving for the fruit and the produce over the earth but this prescribed prayer that I want to pray now for us is just about giving God thanks.
Because we know that we're lost and once we're found we live in a world that's lost and we have a message to bring by the Spirit into the world. So we finish with this prayer.
[15:19] Oh almighty and everlasting God who crowns the year with thy goodness and has given unto us the fruits of the earth and their season. Give us grateful hearts that we may unfeignly thank thee for all thy loving kindness and worthily magnify thy holy name through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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