

This Man Receives Sinners

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn to the second part we read in Luke's Gospel, chapter 15. We've been working through this Gospel. We looked at Psalm 90 this morning, but we'll back to Luke tonight. Luke, chapter 15. I'm not going to read it through, but there's the two parables, the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin. It tells us at the beginning of the chapter, now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them, and so on. And as we know, this chapter here contains three of Jesus' best-known illustrative stories. And as we know, many of these stories that Jesus told and many of the truths that Jesus taught came about to counteract and to correct wrong attitudes, wrong views, wrong spirit, a wrong spirit that people had of and about the Lord Jesus Christ. There were so many people who just could not get their head around the fact that Jesus Christ associated himself with those who were viewed as the outcasts, those who lived on the edge, as it were, of society.

Many of the religious leaders and the rulers, the scribes, the Pharisees, would have no dealing whatever. The Jew had no dealing with the Samaritan, but there were many, these are, we're talking here about Jews. But the publicans, the sinners, they were the outcasts, and these were the kind of people that the religious leaders didn't deal with. They didn't want to become defiled.

They would see themselves as becoming unclean if they were going to start dealing with them. And so they could not understand how Jesus not only spoke with them, but he would sit with them, and he would actually eat with them, and he welcomed them. This was something that they could not understand. And it's not just here. As we've been going through the Gospel of Luke, it is something that has been highlighted over and over and over again, is the sense of bewilderment that the scribes and the Pharisees had with the way that Jesus conducted himself, and with the kind of people that Jesus associated himself with. They just couldn't understand it. And how thankful we are that this is the Jesus that we have, because he is the same today, and he is the only hope for the sinner. And he is the only hope for you and for me. He is the only hope for those who are lost.

And how thankful that tonight he still welcomes the sinner. Tonight, the same thing is said. This man, this God-man, receives sinners, and he eats with them. How wonderful to know that that's true.

[3 : 1 6] Now, of course, when Jesus met with these people, we find that the scribes and the Pharisees grumbled. Now, the language, while it hints at a sense of astonishment, the scribes and the Pharisees grumbled, primarily, it's contempt and pride that they have. There is a sense of astonishment that he is receiving the sinners. But it's a sense of astonishment mingled primarily with contempt and pride.

It's not extraordinary. That's what the religious leaders had in their heart. For Jesus, contempt, astonishment, astonishment, and pride. It's very interesting that Jesus attracted these people. He attracted the outcasts. They were drawn to him. They felt comfortable going to him.

And it's a point I think we have to ask ourselves right now. I wonder where the Christian church, who are made up of all the individuals, all of us here and everywhere else, how do we stand in the eyes of those tonight who have needs and issues and problems, feel marginalized, feel that nobody cares for them. How do they view the church? It's a very interesting thing.

And when we say the church, we're not talking about the building because at the end of the day, the church is made up of individuals. It's something that we have to ask ourselves. And at the end of the day, we, all of us, have to be accessible to people. And surely we should be, if we display the Spirit of Christ. And the great thing about Jesus was this, he never compromised the truth. He didn't ever water down a message. But the reason why Jesus met with these people was out of, and this is what we see so clearly here and elsewhere, Jesus was filled with a heart of compassion. He cared. And people soon know whether a person cares or not. And the church, and again, when I say the church, which is made up of individuals, and that means all of us, you see, we've always got to be careful in how we operate and how we work and how we deal with things. We've got to be careful we don't do things just to be seen. Sometimes you hear people say, oh, we'll have to do something in order to be seen, to be doing something. Well, you have to say to yourself, hold on a second. That almost goes against what Jesus himself was saying.

Jesus said, when you do good, do it quietly. When you give, give it quietly so that your right hand doesn't know what your left is doing. When you fast, don't make any proclamation about it. Do it quietly. When you pray, close your door. In other words, Jesus is saying all these things, get on with them. Do them. By all means, do them. But don't do them in order that people will say, oh, isn't that good? See what he's doing. In other words, don't do them for the sake of being seen to be doing.

[6 : 46] Because if we try to do it in order to be seen to be doing, the reward will be that people will see how well they're doing. Jesus is saying, do it quietly. And your father who sees in secret, he'll reward you openly. Now, of course, in many of the things that people do, they do, yes, they've set out to do quietly, but other people see, and that's fine. Because in fact, Jesus himself says, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and so glorify my father which is in heaven. But we've always got to be careful in all that we do, that our motive is right. Because the Lord sees and understands absolutely everything we do. Why do we do what we do? Is it in order to be well thought of by others? Is it in order that we will look good before others? Or is it out of a heart of love to our Savior? Is this what motivates us? And out of a love and a concern for people. You know, when we think about it, what is our attitude to other people, to those who, let's face it, that Jesus was dealing with in his day? Supposing, for instance, and we live in a relatively small community, and supposing some of the people that we know, but we would never expect them tonight to walk into the church. We know who they are and maybe the kind of people they are, or at least we think we do. And maybe by the way they dress and how they live, and if they came in and sat down, how would you, how would I react? What would our attitude be?

Would we be saying, what are they doing here? I wonder if we would ever think like that. What are they doing here? Why did they come in here? Or would our heart be saying, oh, praise the Lord. Here he has come, she's come, and they've come to sit under the gospel. Would we welcome them, or would we distance ourselves from them? These are challenging questions, because it's, these are things which are right at the very heart of the gospel, the very heart of Christianity, because if we are to follow the example of Christ, and to have the heart of Christ within us, then we must see people for who they are, souls, that unless they have a savior, are perishing and are going to hell. Do we have that vision, or have we become so desensitized nowadays, that we've kind of lost the concept of hell, lost the concept of a lost eternity, and that it doesn't really matter, and we, we categorize people in different ways. Have we lost a sight of humanity, and to see that people are either in Christ or out of Christ? Well, Jesus only saw people as souls. He saw those who needed saving, and so this is how he has come, as it says elsewhere, that Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

And so we find that Jesus is here receiving sinners and eating with them. And the importance of Jesus' in-gathering, going out and seeking to save those who are lost is highlighted in these two stories.

And we've got to say to ourselves, what is at the heart of Christ's mission in this world? It's saving souls. Let's never forget that. What causes joy in heaven? That's an important question.

What causes joy in heaven? Well, I think we, sometimes we can lose our way. Of course, our meetings, our conferences, our conventions, and all these things are important. And it's important for the body of Christ to be built up. But if ever we lose, if the church loses its identity and its purpose in this world, which is for the purpose, it is at the heart of saving souls, because this is why Jesus came into the world, we find it recorded so clearly that what causes joy in heaven is one sinner coming in repentance. Just so I tell you, there will be more joy, remember, more joy in heaven.

[11 : 33] Not just joy, but more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. Have we lost sight of that, I wonder? Have we forgotten? Do we have, do we have the heart of Christ? Do we have this passionate desire for souls to be saved within our own, within our own heart? Anyway, here's this great statement, this man receives sinners. And you know, the great thing is this, supposing we had little else in our Bible, other than this verse, what a wonderful comfort it would be. This man, Jesus, receives sinners. Who am I? I am a sinner. That means that I'm able to go to him. That means tonight, if you're here without Jesus Christ as your own Savior, tonight, you can go to him. There's nothing to prevent you going to him. If you're still outside Christ, why? Ask yourself that question. Have you gone to Christ? There's no point saying to yourself, oh, I'm still outside Christ, and there's nothing I can do. The great we're told in Scripture that we are to seek, we are to search, we're to knock, we're to ask, are you? Well, if you, if you seek, you'll find. If you knock, the door will be opened. If you ask, you will receive. That's what the Word tells us. So, we've got to ask ourselves this question. You must ask yourself this question. If I, tonight, am outside the kingdom, why is it? Is it because I'm not asking, I'm not seeking, I'm not knocking. But the great thing here is that Christ receives sinners. And there's many in here tonight will say, that is true, because the Lord has saved me. And you see, in order to receive, in order for Christ to receive, it means very simply, in order to receive, somebody has to come. If you receive someone, you receive them as they come.

And when we come to the Lord, we come exercising an element of faith, because it tells us in Scripture that about those who seek the Lord, who go to the Lord, those who come to the Lord believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. But again, when we come to the Lord by faith, we come also by way of repentance, because when we come to the Lord, we come to Him as a Savior.

Isn't that right? And straight away, the name Savior, the very name of Jesus, speaks about our sins and our being saved. He shall be called to Jesus, because He saves His people from their sins.

And that's what He's done for so many in here tonight. And they're able to say, it is as a Savior that I have come, to Him, in order that I might be saved from my sins.

And He saves. And these two stories highlight before us the desire, the urgency, the zeal, the commitment of our Lord in seeking to save those who are lost.

[15 : 01] And you know, it's terrible when you see Jesus at work saving and the scribes and the Pharisees mocking in contempt beside Him. But you know, it's funny how often true, well, there's an old saying, many a true word has been said in jest. It wasn't so much jest that they spoke of here, as we say it was contempt, but they spoke a truth.

This man received sinners and eateth with them. It's the same as those who below the cross. They mocked Jesus and they hurled the accusation against Him. And they were saying, He saved others. He cannot save Himself.

And you know, they didn't realize the truth that they were speaking. Because if Jesus had come down from the cross and said, I want to save myself, I do not want to go through with this anymore. I can't take any more of this. I'm going to exercise my sonship, my lordship.

And He could have come down from that cross in a moment, but He didn't. Because He came out of that with a heart of love to do the will of the Father. And what they said was so true. He saved others. He cannot save Himself.

He couldn't save Himself and save others. If Jesus had tried to save Himself, we wouldn't be here tonight. It was because He was not prepared to save Himself that He stayed on that cross and bore all that was on that cross, where He drank all that was in that cup that was given Him to drink.

[16 : 44] And because He didn't save Himself, we have been saved. And we find that they say, Christ receives sinners and He eateth with them.

You see, when Jesus saves a sinner, He doesn't just say, well, that's you saved now. You go into that wee corner and stay there. And I'll think about you in years to come. No.

He receives sinners and He eats with them. He wants to fellowship with us. He wants to company with us. He provides the feeding. Indeed, He Himself is the feeding.

And it's not just scraps. It's the best. If we go to the next story, or the third story about the prodigal, we see that it's the best. It's the best robe. It's a lovely ring.

It's a fatted calf. There's no half measure. It's liberal provision. That's what Jesus does. And so Jesus spends time seeking the lost.

[17 : 44] And these three stories highlight the being lost and being found and the rejoicing. Now, there are many things you can look at.

Just highlight one or two things here. The lost sheep and the lost coin show us the care and the intensity of the searcher.

Everything else, in a sense, was on hold. Everything else was put to the side. The 99 other sheep were left there and away he went to find this one that was lost.

The nine coins, there they were. There was the one that was missing which would have been on this, no doubt it would have been on a chain. Got to find this one.

The others are left. And that's the intensity of the Savior. And you know it's the intensity of those who have the heart of the Savior with regard to the lost.

[18 : 45] I'm sure, and if you're in here tonight without the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, and you are part of a family, and in your family there are those who are saved, you have no idea the pain that you cause to those who love you with all their heart.

and yet, because you're on the outside, you don't realize the pain, and they're just saying, oh, if only, if only. I believe in here tonight that our fathers and there are mothers, there are sons and there are daughters, and your heart is breaking because there are those in your family who are outside the kingdom.

Maybe tonight you have no idea where they are, but your heart is breaking. You love them so much that you would give your own life for them. Well, you know, if you're like that, you have something of the heart of the Savior that has been shown here.

This is the kind of intensity. This is the kind of longing. This is this heart of caring and compassion. This longing that those whom you love will come to find the Lord as Savior.

And then you see the tender way, for instance, that the shepherd deals with the one who is lost. Because you see, when he finds it, he goes after and he goes out the one that is lost until he finds it.

[20 : 20] I love that word, until. He goes out and looks and looks and searches. It's not just a, well, I'll have a wee turn over the hills and see if there's any sign. No. He is going to find.

It's not a sort of saying, well, I'll give it, I'll give it till it gets dark and then that's it. No. Until he finds it. And then you see what he does when he finds it.

And when he finds it, he lays it on his shoulders. This would indicate that this lost sheep is in a bit of a bad way. You see, the shepherd doesn't come and say, oh, look at the sheep, what a mess.

To think of all the time that I spent, of all the energy and all the resources that I put in searching for this and it's ill, it's got a broken leg and it's never going to be able to walk home, I might as well just leave it.

That kind of thinking doesn't enter into the shepherd for one moment. He's found the sheep he's looking for. And you see the heart of compassion continues, picks the sheep up, puts it on his shoulder and carries it home.

[21 : 36] What a beautiful picture we have here of the good shepherd. That's Jesus. This is the good shepherd. Sheep over his shoulder. And may I say to you tonight if you're here without Jesus as Savior, I don't know how you're feeling.

You might be feeling top of the world tonight but maybe you're not. Maybe you're rock bottom. And you feel broken and you feel burdened. And sin has dragged you down and you say to yourself, I don't know what I can do.

I can't make myself right. No, but there's a shepherd who can. And he's able to take you right out of the mess that you're in and lift you up on his shoulders. And he will carry you home.

Doesn't take you part of the way. All of a sudden he doesn't find that you're too heavy to carry. He'll carry you all the way home. And that's the beauty. That's the wonder.

The marvel of this shepherd. That's what he does. Seeking those who are lost. And I would ask that we would be given that kind of heart.

[22 : 40] If you're here tonight and you love the Lord, I pray that you'll have that heart. I pray that I'll have that heart. Because at the end of the day this is the most important, the most wonderful thing that any person can be engaged in is seeking to bring the gospel into people's lives.

Throughout an endless eternity, what are we told? Quoting from Daniel. This is what Daniel says. Those that are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above.

And those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars, forever and ever. Today we, people are obsessed with celebrity and they talk about the stars.

And they talk about people's star shining for a while. Oh, it's only for a wee while. But here, this is different. This is from God's perspective.

This is how it really is. And God's people who are used in the ingathering, they are the ones who will shine like the stars forever and ever.

[23 : 57] Isn't that a wonderful prospect? A wonderful thought. And then we see the picture of collective joy. There's the joy when the silver coin is found.

Joy when the sheep is found. There's this collectiveness. And we, you know, it's a wonderful thought that in heaven there is rejoicing. When you, when the Lord found you and took you home into the safety and security of gospel peace and blessing, do you know there was rejoicing in heaven?

There was rejoicing over you. Great joy. That's what we're told. I tell you there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner. You as a sinner.

The day you came to faith in Jesus Christ, there was more joy in heaven. Isn't that wonderful? Well, may this be at the forefront of our thinking.

These parables also highlight to us what it means to be lost. For both the sheep and the coin, the same thing. To be lost is to be in the wrong place.

[25 : 10] You see, the coin, it belonged to that necklace or that chain. The sheep belonged to the flock. My friend, if you are out, if you're lost tonight, and if you're outside Christ, you're lost, you're in the wrong place.

You're in the right place at one level. physically, you're in the right place in being in church. But you're in the wrong place with regard to your relation to Jesus Christ if you're without him.

To be lost is also in the place of danger. Because with that sheep that was lost, and there's no more defenseless animal than a sheep, that sheep was a prey to every enemy.

And if you're outside Christ, his protecting arm is not around you. You're on your own. And again, to be lost is to be in the place, or we should say, is out of the place of service.

You see, the lost sheep was of no value to the shepherd. The lost coin was of no value to the owner because they're lost.

[26 : 28] And if you're a lost, you're not serving your Savior. You're not serving the Lord Jesus Christ, which at the end of the day is the purpose for our being here.

from the very beginning, God has been seeking. It's not just, it doesn't start with Jesus.

Some people think that the gospel, in a sense, has begun with Jesus. Right from the very dawn of history, when Adam sinned, we find God in his mercy coming, saying, Adam, where are you?

That was the call from the dawn of history. Where are you tonight? That is a very, very important question because, you see, Jesus involves us all.

What man of you having a hundred sheep? It's as if Jesus is tying us all up in this. And that's what he does with his parables.

[27 : 38] where are you in relation to all this? And let me say one last thing if you are a believer. I want you to reassess your own activity with regard to a mission to the lost.

It was John Wesley who said their extraordinary words, but this is what he said. the church has nothing to do but to save souls.

He was talking in the context here of that Jesus Christ has done everything in saving us. And this is what he said, the responsibility of the church. The church has nothing to do but to save souls.

Therefore, spend and be spent. And that's exactly what he did. he lived, he gave his life to the saving of souls.

He burnt himself out. Spend and be spent. Solemn challenge. But there's these parables, these stories tell us something of the heart of Jesus.

[28 : 54] What is our response to be to these things? Let us pray. Oh gracious God, we pray to help us tonight.

We pray that we might be challenged by the word. We give thanks, oh Lord, for the fact that Jesus Christ receives sinners and he eats with them. We pray to bless those who are in church tonight, who may be outside the kingdom.

We pray that they might be brought in. We pray, Lord, for those who are outside, who tonight maybe are in misery. There's darkness in their heart and darkness in their mind.

Help them, oh Lord, reach to where they are. Bring them in. Lord, we give thanks for the great work that goes on often quietly amongst those who have real needs and these unreal problems.

We give thanks, Lord, for those who have gifts, who can get alongside, those who have been used by thyself in so many different ways in our town, in our island, in our communities, and in our congregation.

[30 : 09] We give thanks, oh Lord, for works like the road to recovery, and we pray to bless the work that goes on in our own congregation and throughout the island. We pray, Lord, to encourage and to indeed use mightily those who have been given great gifts in these things.

We pray, Lord, to bless us and each and every one of us. Do us good. Guide us and keep us and take us home safely. In Jesus' name we ask all. Amen.