



Luke 15

Luke 15
Tape #8059
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Shall we turn now to Luke's gospel chapter fifteen as we continue our journey through the Bible.

It's a sabbath day. It began with Jesus being invited by a Pharisee to come for dinner. It was a set up because they also invited a man who had that disease known as dropsy where a serum fills the skin and causes the face and all to look as though it's just dropping. It was a fatal disease. And they brought that man also, invited him also to the dinner in order that they might watch Jesus to see if He would heal him on the sabbath day. And after asking a couple of pertinent questions, He healed the man.

And then He rebuked the other Pharisees who were bidden to the feast because He had watched them on how they were positioning themselves to get the places of honor. He said it would be better to just take a lower place and be invited higher, than to take a higher place and be invited lower.

He then sort of rebuked the host for his guest list. For he invited all of the prominent wealthy people who would be able to reciprocate the invitation. And so there was this class type of an elitism that was going on and He said, You should just go out and invite the people off the street and that would be really more pleasing to God than to try and keep this elite circle going.

And then He went on and gave the parable of the great supper that was prepared and the people began to make their excuses for not coming. And so finally the exhortation to go out into the highways and byways and compel people to come so that the house might be full.

He left the house of the Pharisee and multitudes of the common people were following Him. He turned to them and He laid out extremely severe and strict terms for discipleship. Now not only did the multitudes follow Him, and He began to mix with the multitudes. Perhaps eating with them and all. Common people.

And so the Pharisees and the scribes [who had perhaps also followed Him from the dinner], they were murmuring and they were saying, This man receives sinners and He eats with them (15:1,2).

So there was this kind of sour apples. They had just eaten with Him and He rebukes them and leaves their fellowship in order that He might go out with people with whom He is more comfortable. There are certain circles in which you feel estrange. They're watching the way you place your knife down on the plate. Is the blade toward you or away? Are you on the right side of the plate or across the top of the plate? Are you following all of the proper kind of things. And it's a strain to eat under those circumstances. You don't cut another bite of meat until you thoroughly chewed and swallowed the first bite. Then you put your fork in a certain way and you cut it a certain way. And that's uncomfortable. You never feel comfortable in those kinds of circumstances where people are watching you and judging you. Such was the case as He was dining with the Pharisees, not so much watching the way He placed His fork but just watching Him and scrutinizing Him and that really is what the Greek word is. As He was with them at dinner over this issue of the healing of the man with the dropsy on the sabbath day.

Jesus was far more comfortable with the common people. They're just a lot easier to be around. They're real people. And they could see how that He obviously was in His element when He was out there with sinners, with common people. Not people who are constantly making a pretense, making a show, living in a charade. Jesus was always uncomfortable around those people who were, in His words, hypocrites. Putting on an act, putting on a show. He was far more comfortable with just real people.

And so as He left their company and He was now followed by a multitude of just common people, it was obvious that He was much more comfortable. Much more at ease. Much happier. And so they began to criticize Him. They began to murmur against Him. Because of the kind of company that He preferred. He "receives sinners and He eats with them." To them it was a very condemning kind of an accusation that they were making against the Lord.

So with the background of this attitude and this criticism of Him,

He spake a parable unto them, and He said, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does he not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost (15:3-6).

Theirs was an agrarian society. Most of them were involved in some way in agriculture. The flocks of sheep were very familiar. The setting was extremely familiar to them. They all knew one of the problems with sheep was the fact that they had a tendency to just stray off. And once they had strayed, they had no way of finding their way back. They had no homing instincts. The moment they were out of sight, they were lost. He knew that this was the characteristic and they knew that this was the characteristic of sheep. It was common for sheep to get lost. But when a sheep was lost, it was in danger of losing its life because there were those wild animals that preyed upon the flocks. One of the major tasks of the shepherd was to protect the flock from the wolves and the other wild beasts that preyed upon the flocks.

It was interesting when we were in Israel four or five years ago, how things haven't changed that much. As we were driving down towards Beersheba, we saw on the hillside a large flock of sheep and there were several shepherds. The flock sort of intermingling. And suddenly we saw a burst of activity, we saw the shepherds running and yelling and waving their sticks and we saw this wolf taking off and the shepherds chasing it. And we thought, Not much has changed.

But a sheep when it was lost straightaway became a prey to these predatory animals. Their lives were in danger. And so it was always an emergency kind of a thing when a sheep would be lost because it just could not survive on its own. It's certain death. And so the picture is the shepherd. And as they would come to the sheepfold which in the wilderness was just a, encircle, they would take this thorn bushes and they would make a circle of these thorn bushes. Maybe a little larger than the platform here. And they would build them up to about three feet high and that was the enclosure for the sheep. It had this one opening and at night, the shepherd would bring them into the enclosure and he would pass the sheep under him. He would stand there and the sheep would pass under him and he would check them over to see if there were any cuts that needed attending to, any burrs that needed to be pulled out, and he would count them as he would bring them into the enclosure.

After they were safely in the enclosure, then he would lie across the opening of the enclosure so no animal could get to the sheep because of this thorn bush protection. The only way they could get was to pass over the shepherd who was sleeping in the opening of the enclosure.

And so Jesus tells a story of the shepherd counting the sheep, counting his flock as they are coming into the enclosure. He finds one is missing. And so he pulls thorns over in front of the opening and he goes out into the night to find the lost sheep. And out on the hillside, he hears the little sheep as it finally realizes its lost. And as it's giving its little cry, he takes the sheep, he puts it on his shoulders and he rejoices as he comes back with that sheep that had been lost.

The natural response to finding something that is lost is that of rejoicing. You can see that the parable is directed to the Pharisees and it is against the attitude of the Pharisees for His relationship to sinners. Because He was receiving sinners, they were finding fault. Because He was seeking the lost and finding the lost, they were sour. When in reality, the natural reaction of finding something that is lost is that of rejoicing. So He is pointing out how unnatural is their position of the fact that He was receiving sinners and eating with them.

As we pointed out this morning, it is of course necessary to understand the culture and the traditions of the Pharisees. They believed that if they touched a sinner, that they would be unclean. Somehow the defilement of the sinner could be transmitted to them by just touching a sinner. Even if their robe would swish against a sinner and touch him, or a Gentile, they would be unclean. And they felt they could not worship God until they had first gone through a whole bathing process to get rid of the defilement, I touched a Gentile or I touched a sinner. And they were very untouchable. To eat with a Gentile or a sinner was absolutely unthinkable because in their minds, to eat with someone was equivalent to becoming one with that person.

If you would observe the way they ate, you would understand why. They had on the table soups and little sauces. They would take bread and they would pull off the bread, pass it around the table, pulling off the pieces of bread, and then they'd dip them all into the same sauces and there wasn't the rule that you don't dip twice. So you take a bite and dip it again. And so the fact that you were eating from the same bowl of soup and dipping in the same bowl of soup and eating from the same loaf of bread, it gave them the feeling like, I'm becoming one with you because what I'm eating, you're eating. It's becoming a part of me, it's becoming a part of you. So mystically, I'm becoming related to you by the fact that we are eating the same bread, drinking from the same bowl of soup. They thought of it that way as becoming one with the other person. So to eat with a sinner or with a Gentile was totally unthinkable.

One of the meanest things that could say is that He is receiving sinners, touching sinners and He's eating with them. And Jesus is saying that rather than having that critical, bitter attitude, the fact that sinners are being found, the lost is being found, you ought to be rejoicing and heaven rejoices. So in reality, your heart is out of harmony with heaven's heart.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven [not bitterness, not rancor] over one sinner that repents, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance (15:7).

The sheep there in the fold, you don't have to worry about them. They're safe. It's the one that's out there on the mountainside whose life is in danger that must be sought and found in order to spare its life. That's the one. There's the rejoicing when it is found more than the ninety-nine that are safely in the fold.

Continuing the same idea, you have a woman who has ten drachmae. A drachmae is a little more than a day's wage. A day's wage was a denarius and a drachmae was slightly more than a denarius. So it represented a sizable amount of money. It's a whole day's wage.

She had ten of these pieces of silver, and she lost one (15:8).

This could represent livelihood or it could also represent something else. In those days when a woman was married, she usually had a necklace of coins that was actually worn around the head and the coins were across her forehead. And they were sort of like a wedding ring. They were a sign that she was married and these were highly prized by the women. And it could be that she lost one of the ten coins that comprise this special necklace that was worn on the forehead. Whatever, she lost one. And Jesus said,

does she not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she finds it (15:8)?

The floors of the houses were of compacted dirt and they were usually covered with reeds. There wasn't much light in the house, just a small single window of about eighteen inches. And so they would have to light a candle in order to find something that dropped on the floor. And of course, to drop a coin on a floor that was covered with reeds would be sort of like looking for a needle in the haystack. So you sweep it hoping that it will pick up and you'll get the glitter of it and you'll be able to find it. You'll hear it clink or something and you'll be able to find it. And so the picture again is this time a lost coin.

A coin that has no value because it's lost. The only value a coin has is when you spend it. It then becomes currency. But when it's lost, it could be an extremely valuable coin but it's of no value when it's lost. And so the lost coin and she searches diligently until she finds it.

And when she has found it, she calls her friends and her neighbours together, and she said, Rejoice with me; for I have found the drachmae which I had lost (15:9).

Rejoice. And again, the natural response to finding something that is lost is that of rejoicing. So as the Pharisees were sour apples, as they were down in the mouth because He was receiving sinners and eating with them, He was finding those that were lost. They were out of harmony with heaven. For Jesus said,

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents (15:10).

The finding of the lost. The response is joy. The natural response is joy.

Now in the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd is obviously Jesus Christ who went out to find the lost sheep. He said, "I've come to seek and to save that which is lost" (Luke 19:10). He said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). The first part of this parable, that of the shepherd and the lost sheep, the shepherd obviously is Jesus. The lost sheep is that sinner who had gone astray whom the Lord brings back carrying him, rejoicing that the Lord has been found.

In the second picture, this woman who has lost the coin, the woman is a type of the Holy Spirit who is searching. The Shepherd is seeking the lost, the woman is searching for the lost. The Holy Spirit as He searches for those that are lost until they are found. But now the father in the third part of the parable is featured.

And he said, There was a certain man who had two sons: 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 (15:11,12).

This boy wasn't willing to wait until his dad died and he inherit his part. The older son got two-thirds, the younger son got one third of the inheritance. And so the younger son came and demanded his portion of the inheritance from his father.

And not many days after [receiving it] *the younger son gathered everything together, and he took his journey into a far country, and there he wasted his substance with riotous living (15:13).*

Was living a wild life. Now in this case, you see the son has lost but he is lost by his own deliberate design. He goes out to lose himself in sin. He turns away from the father and from the love of the home and all and deliberately turns his back on that to go out and just to taste the world and the things of the world. And thus, spends his life in riotous living.

But when he had spent everything, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in need. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; who sent him into the fields to feed swine (15:14,15).

What could be more degrading to a Jew than to have to feed swine.

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

As long as he had the bucks, he was popular guy. But the minute his money ran out, his friends ran with it. They had helped him spend his money in riotous living but he, really in need, there's no one there to help him. And so, a citizen of that country gave him this job, rotten job indeed, feeding swine the husks from corn.

And he tried eating them. He was so hungry. When you're desperate you'll eat almost anything. And he tried to curb and satisfy his appetite on these husks that were being fed to the swine. He went about as low as you can get. Sin had brought him down to the bottom.

Sometimes when you see a person on the way down, you wonder, How far do they have to go before they wake up and realize what's happening to them? You wonder, When are they going to wake up? You can see them as they're going downhill, destroying themselves. And you stand by and you feel so helpless because they don't want help. But finally,

When he came to himself (15:17),

When he finally woke up, as though a veil had been over his eyes and he was blinded, as sin does blind a person to their true condition. Sin is destructive. Sin does destroy. It destroys you. It destroys everything that is worthwhile. It will drive you from your home, from your loved ones. And then it will desert you and leave you trying to fill yourself on husks that are fed to the pigs. He came to himself, he looked at himself. His filthy clothes, smelly clothes. Filthy body. And he began to remember what it was like at home. He came to himself.

And he said, How many hired servants my dad has who are living a much better life than this. They have enough bread and some left over, and I'm dying of hunger (15:17)!

Came to himself. I'm starving to death. My dad has servants and they have more than enough bread to eat. They've got surplus and they're just his servants.

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you, And I'm no more worthy to be called your son: but I'd like to have a job just as one of your hired servants (15:18,19).

Put me to work, dad, it's just a servant. I know I'm not worthy to be a son. The recognition, I've blown it. I've messed up my life. I've taken my inheritance and wasted it. And I don't deserve to be called a son but I just like a job as a servant.

Notice the sheep have no way of finding themselves. When they are lost, they are lost. They need

someone to find them. A sheep can't come to itself and say, I'm out here and it's dark. And there are wolves out here, I hear them howling. I better go home. Because he don't know where home is. They have no homing instincts.

A coin, it can't find itself. It's impersonal. But here with this young man, he came to himself. Notice, the father wasn't out searching for him, as the shepherd was searching for the sheep and the woman was searching for the coin. The father was just waiting for him. Waiting for this day that he would wake up. Waiting for this day when he would come to himself and realize his folly.

And so he arose, and he came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off (15:20),

I imagine the father sat there everyday watching the road, waiting for his son to return. And "when he was yet a great way off,"

his father saw him, and he had compassion on him, and he ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him (15:20).

The word there is intensive, he smothered him with kisses. I imagine he smelled like the pig. Still covered with the filth and the dirt from the pigsty. But the father's receiving him. He didn't say, Son, go in and get a bath. Clean up. Then I'll touch you. Then I'll kiss you. But in that filthy state, the father smothered him with kisses. He received that which was lost with joy.

Before the son could even give his little speech, he had it all set. Dad, I blew it. I'm sorry, dad. I don't deserve to be called your son anymore.

I'd like a job of the servant. Before he could get his little speech out completely, he started out on the speech but before he could finish it,

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand [that is, the family ring. It was the seal of authority, the family authority, the signet ring], and put shoes on his feet (15:22):

The shoes on his feet designated him as a son rather than a servant. The slaves didn't wear shoes. Remember the old Negro spiritual? *I got a shoes, you got a shoes, all God's children got shoes. When I get to heaven, gonna put on my shoes. I'm gonna walk all over God's heaven.* That's because slaves didn't have shoes. Putting on the sandals, putting on the shoes was the sign of making him his position as the son again, not a servant, not a slave. But giving him the position of a son. And then he said,

Bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry (15:23): For my son which was dead (15:24),

Dead in his trespasses and sins. Dead to his family and his relationship with the father. My son who was dead,

is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry (15:24).

The rejoicing, the lost has been found. The rejoicing.

Now the punchline. Remember this parable was prompted by the attitude of the Pharisees concerning the fact that Jesus was receiving sinners and eating with them. Now the punchline.

There is the older brother who was out in the field [serving the dad] (15:25):

Faithful in his service to the dad.

and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard the music and the dancing. And he called one of the servants, and he asked him, what's going on? What does this mean? And he said unto him, Your brother is come; and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound (15:25-27).

There's a party, your brother's home.

And he was angry (15:28),

He represents the Pharisees who were complaining because Jesus was receiving sinners and eating with them. He represents the Pharisees, this older brother, who is totally out of harmony with his father. Oh yes, he's obedient. No, he never ran away. Yes, he always did the right thing. But yet he was out of harmony with the heart of his father.

And so Jesus is pointing out that the Pharisees by their very attitude are out of harmony with heaven. Heaven rejoices when the lost sheep has been found. Heaven rejoices when the lost coin is put back into circulation. Heaven rejoices when the lost son comes home. The father is rejoicing, he orders the party. He's

ready to forgive. Oh what grace is exemplified in this story. The Gospel is here. The Gospel of God's grace towards sinning men.

This Pharisaic attitude is not yet dead. It does exist often even within the church. There are people who are not willing to restore those that are lost or have become lost. There are those that are still critical of an endeavor to lift the fallen and to minister grace to them. Their hearts are out of harmony with the heart of God. They have a Pharisaic attitude.

And so the father goes out (15:28)

and he deals with this elder son who is angry and the father, it said,
entreated him (15:28).

He sought to reason with him.

And he said to his father, Lo, these many years I have served you, I've not transgressed at any time your commandment: and yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this your son was come, which has devoured his living with prostitutes, you've killed for him the fatted calf (15:29,30).

He was upset with his dad because of his dad's love and mercy towards the son that was lost and had gone out and played the fool. Had done such horrible things. Here I am, I've always obeyed you. I haven't strayed once. I've done the things that you asked.

And here were the Pharisees, they were trying to keep the law to the very letter. Here were the Pharisees with their robes wrapped tightly around them so they wouldn't touch sinners. Here's the Pharisee who wouldn't think of eating with the sinner. I've kept your law. I've done your commandments.

But though you may be obedient to the commandments and be punctilious in this outward form of righteousness, yet within your heart, you're out of harmony with the heart of the Father whose heart is filled with compassion towards the erring son who was lost and rejoices that the son has finally come to himself and come home.

The father deals with him graciously.

He said to him, Son, you are ever with me (15:31),

That's true.

and all that I have is yours (15:31). It was necessary that we should party, and be glad: for this your brother was dead, and he is now alive again; and he was lost, and is found (15:32).

Jesus in this is rebuking the Pharisees for their attitude that He was receiving sinners. Now, they were fearful that by touching sinners they would be defiled. That the sinners' defilement would pass over on to them if they but touch the sinners. They found fault with Jesus because he was touching sinners. He was eating with sinners. Did it not defile Him that He touched sinners, that He ate with them? No, it did not. What it did was cleanse the sinners. Everytime He touched a sinner, rather than Him being defiled by the defilement of the sinner, the sinner instead was cleansed by His touch. No longer a sinner.

We read the story of the leper who said to Jesus, "If you will, you can make me clean. And Jesus touched him, and said, I will; be thou clean" (Matthew 8:2,3). You say, it's now lawful to touch a leper. Right. Under the Mosaic law, you weren't to touch a leper, you've become unclean and have to go through the cleansing ceremony. But by the time Jesus touched him, he was already cleansed. The touch of Jesus always is a cleansing touch. And no sinner has yet eaten with Jesus but what he wasn't cleansed. No sinner has yet touched Jesus but what he wasn't transformed and changed.

The woman in chapter seven. When Jesus was eating at the house of Simon the Pharisee, the woman who was a prostitute, a noted sinner in town, who came and stood at the feet of Jesus as He was reclining at the table and overcome with the sense of her own sin, her own guilt, her life that she had wasted, standing there in the presence of Jesus, she began to weep. As she realized what she had done with her life and just weeping. Her tears falling on His feet. As she sees her tears falling on His feet, she gets embarrassed and starts wiping His feet off with her hair. And then she takes her little alabaster box of perfume and pours it on His feet and begins to smother them with kisses.

And Simon the Pharisee said if this man were really a prophet, He wouldn't let that woman touch Him because she's a prostitute. And Jesus stopped Simon. He said, I have something to say to you. And he said,

Go ahead, say it. Jesus gave him an illustration. And then He said unto Simon, I say unto you that this woman, “whose sins are many, is forgiven. And whoever is forgiven much, loves much” (Luke 7:47).

You didn’t show love. You didn’t show courtesy. You didn’t kiss Me. You didn’t greet Me with a kiss. You didn’t wash My feet. You didn’t anoint My head with oil, which was customary in those days. It was just common courtesy when a guest came for dinner to wash his feet or have the servant wash his feet. It was common courtesy for the host to put a kiss on his cheek and to anoint his head with oil. Simon the Pharisee did not offer to Jesus one of the common courtesies.

But He said, This woman, she has washed My feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. Poured on them perfume and has not ceased to kiss them. And I say unto you, Her sins which were many are forgiven.

Jesus let her touch Him but by her touching Him, she received the forgiveness of her sins. It didn’t defile Jesus, it brought her cleansing. That’s always the case. Jesus, in the nineteenth chapter as we will get there in a few weeks, went to the house of Zacchaeus to eat. And He ate with a tax collector, a publican and here is the very same thing. They’re griping here because He eats with publicans and sinners. He receives sinners, He eats with them. And now He’s eating with a publican, Zacchaeus. And again they’re murmuring. They said, He has gone into the house of a publican to eat. Again they’re critical and finding fault. Bitter.

Did eating with Zacchaeus defile Jesus? No. But at the end of the dinner, Zacchaeus said, “If I have taken from any man fraudulently, I will restore to him fourfold. And Jesus said, Today is salvation come to this house” (Luke 19:8,9). You see, by eating with Jesus he didn’t defile Jesus but he was cleansed. He was forgiven.

Jesus receives sinners. He searches for that sinner. He seeks those that are lost. And the Father waits for them to come to themselves and to return home. But the effect is always rejoicing, it’s always that of joy. That’s the natural response. When you find or receive something that has been lost, the natural response is rejoicing. The Pharisees out of harmony with the heart of God were bitter, they were upset. They were angry. They were the older brother who was angry because the father received with joy the lost son.

So interesting truths in chapter fifteen that give us insight into the heart of the Father and into the heart of the Son and into the heart of the Holy Spirit, who are seeking, searching and waiting for the lost to be found.

Father, thank You for these special lessons taught by our Lord that give us insight to Your heart. Help us, Lord, surely we want to be in harmony with Your heart. We want to rejoice in the things that heaven rejoices in, the lost being found, the estranged son being restored. And so, Father, give us Your heart and a heart for the lost. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.

Jesus came to seek and to save those who were lost and if you want to be engaged in the work of Jesus, and in harmony with His heart, go out this week and seek those that are lost. To bring to them the glorious truth of the Father’s love, the Father’s care. And He’s waiting to welcome them and to make them a part of the family.

May the Lord be with you and bless you this week as you seek to follow Jesus Christ, as you seek to know Him better, and follow Him more closely. May you know the joy of His presence with you. May you experience that flush that comes from realizing the Lord is there with you. And may you experience His help and His strength to see you through the week. And above all, may your heart be in harmony with His, beating with His heart with the desire of seeing the lost restored again to life.