

THE LOST SHEEP: LUKE 15:1-7

VOCAB WORDS:

1. **The Pharisees:** These are pious religious Jews that were more concerned with making up extra rules to follow, rather than serving God with their heart. They thought they were very righteous and looked down on all others. When reading about Pharisees in the New Testament, understand that they are people that didn't believe Jesus because they were very arrogant.
2. **The Scribes:** In the New Testament, the word "scribe" specifically refers to someone who copies the "law". This is referring to the Law of Moses. When we read about scribes in the New Testament, understand that they are people that don't believe in Jesus because they are very arrogant.
3. **Tax Collectors:** In the time of the Gospels, Rome ruled the world. Though the Jews had their own land and own rules, they still had to answer to Roman authority, and pay Roman taxes. "Tax collectors" refers to the Jews that would collect taxes from their fellow Jews, and give them to the Roman authorities.

THE CONTEXT: LUKE 15:1-2

Who was came to Jesus? What was their intention?

Sinners and tax collectors came to Jesus. This crowd would be unreligious and of bad reputation. In the gospels, we see that tax collectors are used to embody and symbolize the sinful unpopular crowd. Tax collectors were sinful because (typically) they would lie about what people owed, and collect extra for their own pockets. This is just as bad as stealing. Not only were the tax collectors unpopular for their dishonesty, but also because people viewed their vocation as a disgrace. They were considered treacherous because they worked for the Roman Empire.

Though the crowd around Jesus was of a suspicious sort, their intentions were good. They came to listen to Jesus. So many would come to Jesus seeking a sign. Others would come to Jesus to challenge Him. Too few came to Him seeking the wisdom of His words. Regardless of the sinners' past, Jesus would appreciate and hold this crowd dear.

What other crowd was passing judgment? What was "getting their goat"?

The Pharisees and scribes saw Jesus with the disreputable crowd. The Pharisees and scribes considered themselves the polar opposite from that crowd. They thought themselves to be the spiritual icons of the day, but their envy, arrogance, and greed hindered them from truly growing spiritually.

The arrogance of the Pharisees and scribes led them to believe that they shouldn't associate with "immoral people", not even for spiritual teaching. So when they saw Jesus eating with sinners, they were filled with envy, and accused Jesus of sin for associating with immoral people.

How will this context influence Jesus' parable?

There are sinners that desire to hear His word, and there are self-righteous arrogant Jews listening to Jesus. Somehow He will need to teach something beneficial to both parties.

THE PARABLE: LUKE 15:3-6

What are the characters in this parable?

There is a shepherd. He is looking after his sheep. It is his responsibility to care and keep them safe. There are a group of 99 sheep. These sheep are safe under the shepherds care. Then there is the one lost sheep. This sheep has somehow wandered away. It is no longer under the shepherd's protection. It is in danger of the elements and wildlife.

What happens in this parable?

A shepherd is caring for his 100 sheep, when one gets lost somewhere among the pastures. The shepherd leaves the 99 to seek for the lost sheep. When he finds the lost sheep, he carries it all the way back to safety. When he returns home, he is so excited to have his sheep back that he throw a party with his friends. Evidently this shepherd really loves his sheep.

Did the shepherd need to go through all the trouble to save this sheep?

The sheep is lost due to its own stupidity. It either wandered off because it was not paying attention, or it wandered off to find something better. Either way, the shepherd could curse the dumb sheep, and allow the predators to feast upon it, but the shepherd doesn't because he loves his sheep. The shepherd goes to extreme (to the point of reckless and absurd) measures to bring his sheep back to safety. He abandons the 99, wanders throughout the wilderness, carries it on his back, and finally throws a party for it. Do we see any evidence that the shepherd was angry at the sheep's folly? No we do not.

What made the shepherd so happy when he found the sheep?

This sounds like a simple question. Why was he happy? Because he found the lost sheep. Yes, that's right, but be a little more specific. What was so bad about the sheep being lost? The sheep was in danger of the elements and predators. The sheep would die without the shepherd's protection. When the shepherd found his lost sheep, he saved it from imminent doom. The shepherd loves his sheep. He didn't want to see his sheep suffer. When the sheep was found, it was saved from suffering. This was plenty for the shepherd to rejoice about.

THE MORAL: LUKE 15:7 "JOY IN HEAVEN FOR ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS"

This parable is pretty simple to understand, but before we jump the gun on its meaning, let's look closely to see exactly what the moral teaches. The moral doesn't teach that we need to repent, and it doesn't teach that we need to be merciful to the lost. This moral teaches that God and the heavens are ecstatic when one person repents. Jesus is a genius. What a powerful concept. God literally celebrates when we repent.

We also need to acknowledge the 99 that need no repentance. It says God rejoices more for one repenting sinner than for 99 servants needing no repentance. Is this teaching that God is indifferent to His faithful followers? No. This is just saying that God has a greater reason to rejoice over a repentant person. The interpretation and application can help us understand why.

THE INTERPRETATION:

This parable is pretty easy to interpret, but let's review it to get the full meaning.

Who does the shepherd represent?

The shepherd represents God. God is a loving master that cares for weaker dependant creatures. He wants to keep them safe from harm.

What does the 99 sheep represent?

These sheep represent people who are safe from harm. What is keeping them safe? They are under the shepherd's care. These sheep represent people who are safe because they are obedient to God. Today it represents saved Christians. What's keeping us safe? We are safe from judgment because we are living under God's care by our servitude.

What does the lost sheep represent?

The lost sheep represents someone who has wandered away from God. For whatever reason, we leave God. We are either ignorant, selfish, apathetic, or rebellious. Whatever the reason, we leave God's safety, and venture into a place beyond God's care. As long as we remain away from the Lord, we are in danger of judgment.

What does the danger of the wilderness represent?

The sheep was in danger without the shepherd. This represents the danger of judgment and hell we are in if we don't have God's protection. Christ is who can save us from this danger.

What does the shepherd seeking the lost sheep represent?

This represents God's desire to have us back. God doesn't care why we are lost or what we are doing when we are lost. God just wants us to be found and brought safely back. God will not hold our wandering against us when we return.

What does the shepherd carrying the sheep on his back represent?

This represents God doing all the work to bring us back to Him. When we wander off, we can't find our way back to God. Lucky for us, God can find us, but when He finds us, we don't have the strength to walk back. Instead God carries us. When I've wandered off in sin, I can't make myself clean and pure again. Instead, God has sacrificed His son for us so we can be brought back to God. God has put forth great efforts to enable to sinner's return.

What does the party represent?

The party represents all the joy that the Lord feels when we've repented. He doesn't make a list of all the sinful things we did. He doesn't put us on probation or parole. He simply rejoices. What an amazing thing. Did you know that you have such an impact on your creator? It gives me chills.

THE APPLICATION:

When we start to apply the moral, we see how genius Jesus really is. Remember that Jesus is teaching to two contrasting groups. How could He teach one lesson that is pertinent to such opposing parties? If Jesus taught repentance, it would apply to the sinners, but the Pharisees would feel as if it had nothing to do with them (because they considered themselves to be perfect). If Jesus taught about showing mercy to the lost, the Pharisees might learn, but the sinners wouldn't be convicted to do anything. Instead Jesus taught that God is overjoyed when a sinner repents. Now consider how this moral can equally apply to both groups in different ways.

For the sinners and tax collectors listening to Jesus, they would feel encouraged to return to God knowing that He still loves them. Yet the Pharisees would feel obligated to be more concerned and less judgmental of the lost knowing that God earnestly loves them and longs for their return.

Remember that God rejoices when a sinner repents because that beloved child will not need to suffer judgment. We can't be overwhelmed by our sin and believe that God is anxious to destroy us. God wants us to come to Him so He doesn't have to destroy us. Also, we need to remember to reach the lost because we want them to be safe in Christ. If we ever deny someone the gospel, we are leaving them to die in the wilderness and face God's wrath. Can we do that to someone and expect God to save us? I don't think so.

Now it is clear why God rejoices more for a repentant sinner, than 99 faithful followers. Do you jump up and down rejoicing when you see your sibling every morning? Not likely. What if your sibling was in a fatal accident? Would you have a greater reason to celebrate when he or she miraculously heals? Yes. Would you be worried about your cousin? No. You'd be busy praying for your sibling's recovery. This is exactly what Jesus is trying to express. God doesn't love a repentant sinner more than His faithful followers. God is just so concerned about His loved ones being saved from peril.

THE LOST COIN: LUKE 15:1-10

THE CONTEXT: LUKE 15:1-2, 3-7

The context of this parable is the same as the context of the lost sheep. Jesus is talking to the same two groups of people. This is a continuation of the same discourse. Now Jesus is going to teach another parable for them. This will be the second parable in a row.

When Jesus teaches a series of parables, it isn't by chance. Sometimes Jesus will teach several parables to make many points about one topic. Jesus does this in Matthew 13 with the parables about the Church. Other times Jesus will teach several parables to emphasize one point. That is what Jesus did in Matthew 24:45-25 (the parables of the wicked slave, the foolish virgins, and the lazy servant). Since this is the second of a series of parables, we will need to look for Jesus' train of thought. The last parable emphasized how joyful the Lord is when a sinner repents. Keep that in mind as we study the parable of the lost coin.

THE PARABLE: LUKE 15:8-9

What are the characters in this parable?

There is a woman who has ten silver coins. If you're human, you can relate to how valuable money is. The woman values her coins greatly. If she loses one coin, that is a tenth of her assets. She will not want to lose any coins because they are all valuable.

There are nine present coins. These coins retain their value because they remain with the woman. As long as she has them, they are valuable.

There is one lost coin. This coin is of no value to the woman because she doesn't possess it anymore. The money in my bank is no value to you because you don't possess it. The coin is still potentially valuable, but as long as it remains hidden in the couch cushion, it is of no use to the woman. Even though the coin has no value while hidden, it is sought after for its potential value.

What happens in this parable?

The woman who owns ten silver coins loses one. She lights a lamp and she sweeps the house in an attempt to find it. Finally when she finds it, she calls her friends over to rejoice with her.

Why did the woman rejoice over the lost coin?

Again, this sounds simple, but think specifically. The shepherd celebrated because his sheep was saved from danger. What about this coin? What changed when this coin was found? The change that took place in the coin was the restoration of its value. The coin had no value while it was lost. Now that the coin is found, its value has been restored. The woman is rejoicing because she can benefit from the value of the retrieved coin.

THE MORAL: LUKE 15:10 "JOY FOR ONE SINNER WHO REPENTS"

This should sound familiar. Once again, this parable is emphasizing that God rejoices when a sinner repents. Are there any differences in this moral? The moral of the previous parable states that God rejoices more for one repentant sinner than 99 that need no repentance. This moral only pronounces God's joy. We don't need to compare the lost coin to the other nine coins.

Why did Jesus teach two parables with (practically) the same moral? Jesus uses repetition carefully and always purposefully. Jesus repeats Himself when He wants to stress a very important point. This is seen in the parables about the kingdom's value in Mat 13:44-46. Another example is Mark 9:43-48. The strongest example is Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees in Mat 23. He repeats "Woe to you Pharisees and scribes" eight times in that single chapter. He was really stressing a point. The fact that Jesus repeats the same moral shows us that it is important and He wants us to know it.

THE INTERPRETATION:

What does the woman represent?

The woman represents God whom greatly desires and seeks us when we are lost. The woman needed to use the coins. She couldn't use the coin if it was lost. God possesses us to use us. We can't be used for God's purpose if we are lost.

What do the nine coins represent?

They represent God's faithful followers that remain with Him. Those coins are still useful to the woman because she possesses them. We are useful to God when we are in His possession. We remain in His possession as long as we are faithful to Him.

What does the lost coin represent?

The lost coin represents a sinner that has fallen away from the Lord. That coin isn't useful to the woman because she doesn't have it. The coin still has value, but not to the woman. When we leave God, we are no longer useful to Him. We can't teach others, we can't be a good influence to others, and we can't praise Him if we are lost. We still have value, but our value isn't useful to God if we are lost.

What does the woman's search through her house represent?

This represents God's great joy for us to return to Him. He wants us to return so He can have our value again.

What does the party represent?

This represents God's great joy when we are returned to Him. He rejoices because our value has been restored to Him.

THE APPLICATION:

Once again this parable applies to the sinners and Pharisees more than a simple message of repentance or mercy. The sinners will feel encouraged to repent knowing that God longs for their return. The Pharisees will be more merciful and less judgmental knowing that God still loves sinners greatly.

This parable specifically applies to our value. Why does God (specifically) want us to return to Him in this parable? God wants sinners to return so they can be valuable again. When we are lost, all our talents and abilities are wasted on vain things. If we return to God, our personalities, abilities, concerns, dreams, passions, and anything else that makes up our being can be used for Him. God is sorrowful knowing that there are people with amazing abilities hidden in the "seat cushions" of the world. Did you ever have the feeling that we could teach more of the world about Christ if there were more Christians? That's exactly right. If there were twice as many faithful Christians, there would be twice as much teaching. What a powerful thing.

Don't be overwhelmed by your sin. Know that you are valuable to God if you let Him guide your efforts. Think of the Apostle Paul. He used his talents and abilities to fervently persecute Christ. After his conversion, he used all those same abilities for Christ. We can do the same. Also, we can't look at others and think that they're too evil to be saved. We need to believe that whatever talents they have can be used for Christ. Let's return to God and make Him proud with all the gifts He has given us.