

The Lost Sheep

September 18, 2016

Luke 15:3-7

As we continue our study of the parables, we come to Luke 15. There are three parables back to back in this chapter: the parable of the lost sheep, the parable of the lost coin, and the parable of the lost sons (or the parable of the prodigal son). Now, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to see a pattern here. There seems to be a common theme of the lost being found, or more specifically the joy and celebration that follows the lost being found. I think Jesus is trying to make a point!

Indeed, the point is clear and easy to see: Our God has incredible joy and celebration when one of His own "lost" ones is found. Right? Clearly you can see that before we even read the specific parables. Each one has a celebration following the lost being found. But this only brings up the question, "Why is this such a huge point?" Why make the same basic point three times? Why not just one parable on the lost?

Over these next three weeks, we will look at each of these three parables in detail, seeing the precise point that the particular parable makes, but here, I would like to begin with the general point. Why would Jesus make such a strong point on God being joyful when one of His lost is found?

It seems clear to me that His perspective is the opposite of what we would naturally expect. That is the nature of a parable, delivering a hard message. So, in this case the hard message is not so much the celebrating that God does when One of His own is found, but the expected opposite of that, and what it says about us. We have this mistaken notion that the good people belong to God. Right? We value, we honor, we think highly of the righteous people, the good people, the people who have it all together. Right?

Indeed, it would surprise us that God does not value, does not honor, does not think highly of the righteous people, the good people, the people who have it all together. That would be shocking to us. Agreed? But it is true. Why? Because the truth is that we are all bad, we are all bad, and we all deserve to die. There is none righteous, no not one. There is none who always does what is right and never does what is wrong. We ALL like sheep have gone astray, every one of us has turned to his own way. Right? So when we think we are righteous, are good, have it all together, we are fooling ourselves and have no need for a

Savior. That is a dangerous position to be in, thinking we do not need saving. Agreed?

Welcome to the three parables of the lost being found. We will see more about the context in a few minutes, but at this point I would like to read the first of the three “lost” parables, the parable of the lost sheep from Luke 15. We will begin at v.1 and read through v.7. Follow along as we read Luke 15:1-7.

Main point: Our Lord cherishes every one of His lost sheep.

Now, on one hand, you might say, “Of course He does! How could He not? What’s the big deal about this parable?” And yet, this parable has as much to say about the 99 as about the one. He is willing to leave the 99 for the sake of the one. And there is a reason for that as well. You might say it this way, “Jesus whole mission was to save lost sheep. He is the Savior of lost sheep... and no others.” There is the hard news. He is a Savior. If you do not “need” saving, He is of no use to you. He loves to save, He cherishes the lost. But He has no relationship with those who have no need of saving. Sound harsh? Of course. Is it the truth? Without a doubt.

So, in a sense I have already let you know where we are going this morning. So, sit back and see how we get there. And then I urge you to examine yourself to see if you are the 99 or the 1. Do you need a Savior?

I. Setting: The religious people think it is wrong that Jesus spends so much time with “sinners.” 14:1-35, 15:1-2.

Once more, we see that the setting is key to understanding the parable. As the “good” people, the Pharisees and religious leaders looked down their noses at the fact that Jesus valued despicable people.

Pause for a second: given the events of this past week, I am tempted to use the word “deplorable” and “irredeemable” at this point. I do not want to get

political, but it is the same point. The elites of any society all look down their noses at the groups of people they deem “despicable,” or “deplorable” or “irredeemable.” You might call them, “Those people.” And the sad fact is, it is just as true in religious circles as it is in society as a whole.

I invite you to spend a couple of minutes perusing chapter I4. In fact, you could go back further than that for context because even chapter I3 speaks to the issue, but for the sake of time, we will go only back as far as ch.I4. There we see that Jesus had an incident in the home of a prominent Pharisee. (v.I) The question was whether Jesus could lawfully heal a disabled man on the Sabbath. Jesus puts this prominent do-gooder in his place, and then uses the occasion to put some others in their place who were exploiting their lofty view of themselves.

He then gives the parable of the banquet, which we will return to at some time, but the point is that God’s “banquet” will be for those who come, not for those who think they ought to be begged to come.

Then He teaches on how much it costs people to become His disciple. In other words, you ought not think the Kingdom of God comes to the deserving, but comes to the willing, those who know how valuable it is and seek after it. It is not the reward for the connected, but the only hope of the desperate.

Then we come to chapter I5.

v.I- Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him.

We have already become familiar to this word, “sinners.” You have to say it with disgust in your voice, like “deplorables.” Here, we have “tax collectors” added to it. The tax collectors were people who were Jewish but worked for the Romans, collecting Roman taxes from their fellow Jews and keeping a percentage for themselves. As you can imagine, they were considered traitors and thieves by their fellow Jews, turncoats who have sold their souls to the enemy. They were hated.

So, Jesus is hanging out with a group of people like that, sinners and tax collectors. He was teaching, and they were listening intently. They created a flash mob for Jesus, a disgusting flash mob for the elites.

²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

As you can easily tell, they were not pleased. They were disgusted. This was not giving Jesus credit or lifting Him up in their eyes. Instead, they lumped Him in with them. Their reputation rubbed off on Him. To the elites, this brought Jesus down to the “sinners” place of contempt in society. He is hanging out with “those” people, you fill in the blanks. Perhaps they needed to put their hat on straight, or cut their hair, or pull their pants up. I’m sure everyone in town knew how they made their living, and spent their living as well. You know what I mean, cigarettes hanging from their mouth, tattoos on their arms, the smell of last night’s alcohol. You know the type.

Not only was Jesus okay with being seen with such types, but He actually ate with them, fellowshiped with them, greeted them warmly as if they were old friends. You just don’t do that!

So, the setting for the parable is Jesus being ridiculed for the company He kept. Doesn’t He know how this looks to everyone in town when He hangs out with such people?

II. The parable itself: A good shepherd cares about his lost sheep. vv.3-7

The parable gives the perspective of a good shepherd. And, as you might expect, it differs from those who know nothing about being good shepherds.

³Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?

Somehow, Jesus knew of their muttering. Perhaps He could read it all over their faces. They may have been muttering out loud, but we know from other texts, He might have just read their minds.

Instead of confronting them and giving them a piece of His mind (as I probably would do), He told them a parable. It is a parable of comparison (99 to 1), and also a natural reaction to good news. First the comparison of size. A flock of 100 sheep would not be unusual. That would be normal. A good

shepherd would count His sheep every day to make sure they were all there, especially in a setting where there were no fences. You led your sheep around wherever there was grass, counting to make sure you didn't lose any along the way. Even though 99 is a lot more than one, I suspect all of us would be concerned to lose one. Right? What happened to my other sheep? Where did he go?

The question here is whether you would care enough for the one sheep to leave the 99 sheep to go find the lost sheep. Would you do that? And that is where we see that a good shepherd would. He would care enough about the one lost one to risk leaving all the rest in the care of another while he searched for the one. You do that if you value each individual sheep. You do that if you consider yourself responsible for all the sheep. You do that when 99/100 is not acceptable. You do that if you care. And that is the point.

Notice he searches until he finds it. He doesn't quit, He doesn't just stand and look, but He takes the initiative in seeking, searching, probing cracks and crevasses. It is His mission, and He takes it seriously.

⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'

The text then jumps to what happens when He finds it. He doesn't beat it, chase it, yell at it. Instead He with joy picks it up and carries it back to the flock. He treats it as precious. He shares the good news of His finding with His friends and neighbors. He wants everyone to share His good news. His lost sheep has been found!

What does this scenario tell us about the Shepherd? He loves His sheep, all of them. He takes personal responsibility for all of them. And He views it as a joyous event when a lost one is found. Right?

Okay, does it sound like we understand the parable? I think so. It is pretty straight forward. The point of the parable is clear. A good shepherd cares about ALL of His sheep, and is especially pleased when He finds a lost one.

III. Application of the parable to the setting: Our good shepherd is pleased to spend time with found “lost sheep!” v.7

He is not embarrassed, not put off, not ashamed. No, this is who He is, a finder of lost sheep. Spending time with previously lost sheep brings Him great joy.

⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

This is where the application point is made, and an underlying additional zinger point is made as well. To find the point, we have to identify the characters in the story. Who is the shepherd? Jesus. Clearly, He is the good shepherd here. Who are the lost sheep? Clearly they are the tax collectors and “sinners.” Does this answer their muttering? Of course it does. Jesus sees such deplorables as not only worthy of His time, but worth all the effort necessary to find them. He is their shepherd, their Savior. He does not beat them, or yell at them, or belittle them. Instead, He takes them into His arms and carries them home. He celebrates the finding of each one. He loves it when they are crowded around Him. He is not ashamed or embarrassed. He loves them.

Okay, so who are the 99? Them, the righteous, the religious types. That much is clear as well. But this is where the parable stands the situation on its head. In the story, what do we know about the 99? There is no rejoicing over them. Notice the emphasis on the need to repent. Why don’t they need to repent? Is it because they’ve done nothing wrong? We know that is not true.

They do not need to repent because they do not think they have done anything wrong. From their perspective, they have nothing to repent of. They are the “good people,” not like those “sinners” and tax collectors. If you don’t think you are lost, you don’t need saving. If you are not saved, there is no rejoicing over you! There is rejoicing only for lost who are saved. Right?

So, in the parable, you might think they are safe, cared for, the good sheep. But with the application we see that the opposite is true. They too are lost, but

they refuse to admit it, so they never have a relationship with their Savior. They are so good, they don't need a shepherd. They protect themselves. No harm could possibly come to them. They are not frightened, in danger, crying out desperately for help. They're doing just fine...or so they think. The key is that there is no rejoicing in the heavens for 99 of them. The comparison is flipped on its head. There is a louder roar for the one than the 99. Why? Because the one was saved. The others WERE NOT saved. They didn't need saving. The only rejoicing in the heavens takes place when the lost are found. Isn't that what it says?

Can you see how this fits the setting? The religious elites looked down their noses at Jesus for associating with such lowlifes. They would never stoop so low. How dare Jesus risk His reputation by rubbing up against such people? Oh wait, at the end of chapter 14, He gives the teaching about being salt, saying if you don't rub up against something you are not even good enough for the manure pile. You are worthless trash. Salt has to rub up against that which it seeks to preserve. These Pharisees were salt that had lost their saltiness. They were worthless and would be thrown out. They were not good shepherds, they cared not for lost sheep. In fact, they were lost sheep and didn't even know it. (Oops, we'll see that in the parable of the lost sonS.)

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

1) We will see ourselves as lost sheep needing a Good Shepherd, not good sheep who need no one or nothing.

2) We will see other lost sheep as people just like us.

3) We will rejoice with our Good Shepherd when another lost sheep is found.

4) We will be willing to risk everything to lead lost sheep to their Good Shepherd.