

**Home : Sermons : September 24, 2006****The Joy of God in Redeeming the Lost – Luke 15:1-32**

**Introduction** – Once again, we find Jesus engaged in fellowship and teaching around a meal. Tax collectors and sinners are drawing near to be with Him and this is infuriating the Pharisees and the scribes. “*This Man receives sinners and eats with them,*” they cry. The rest of Luke 15 is Jesus’ reply to this comment and mindset. Here we find one of the most-loved of the parables of Jesus, known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Once again, remember the context.

**Three Parables or One?** – “So He spoke this parable to them, saying...” These three “stories” are really just one, like a symphony with three movements. The first two movements are both straightforward, and the finale, telling the same story, adds much more ornamentation and punch. In each story, something is lost (vv4, 8, 32). Each story has a person who searches diligently for that which was lost (vv4, 8, 20). In each story the lost item is found and a party is called to celebrate with friends (vv 6, 9, 22-25).

Of course, there are differences as well. The final story has an extended coda, if you will, about the elder brother, and the story is left without a final ending. And this is the point. Jesus is in the habit of having parties with all the “wrong” people. Some of Israel that is lost has been found, and some of Israel is not pleased that the lost ones are coming back. Israel is lacking the joy of the gospel, the joy of seeing a sinner repent.

**Lost Sheep/Lost Coin** – The lost sheep story harkens back to God as the Shepherd of Israel (Psalm 23, Jer 23:1-8, Ezek 34). Psalm 23:3, translated, “*he restores my soul*” could better be translated, “*he causes my soul to return.*” David is wandering from the paths of righteousness and God Himself turns Him back. Then, the Psalm also ends with rejoicing at a meal (vv5-6). With the lost coin, again the owner, this time a woman, is desperate and will not cease until she finds her coin.

**Aspects of Salvation** – Jesus is the Shepherd seeking after the lost “David.” While repentance is something we must do (Luke 3:3, 5:32), the lost sheep (or coin) will not return unless that “return” is caused by another. They are irresistibly drawn (returned) all at the initiation of the owner. There are two types of people sitting at table with Jesus. One type sees their repentance, their turning to Jesus as the gift of repentance – because Jesus came seeking them. The other type thinks they do not need to repent (Luke 15:7).

**Great Joy** – In both of these stories it is said, “Rejoice with me” for what was lost was found. Joining in that rejoicing is to join with the heavens, the angels, and God Himself, in the delight of bringing back a sinner from destruction. Joy in the presence of the angels can only be the joy of God Himself (Zeph 3:17).

**An Allegory of Two Sons** (vv11-32) – There is a great theme in this story of the love and forgiving grace of God the Father, ready to welcome back sinners at the first sign of repentance, but the story is really about two different sons and two different responses to the seeking, pursuing, welcoming grace of God.

**The Younger Son** – Here is a retelling of the story of Israel, God’s lost son. Displaying great contempt for his father, wasting his inheritance and sent into exile, the son finally comes home in repentance. Instead of being angry, the father throws a feast. Instead of demanding repayment, the father gives back the son’s high position in the house, marked by a robe, a ring, and sandals (v22). Here is also the retelling of our own stories in principle. All of us by nature do not like the Father’s *presence*, although we want His *presents*. He is too holy for us; He is an imposition. We do not delight in His Word or ways and we start looking at life with Him as though we were a slave and not a son. God often then custom-designs a famine for us and brings us to our senses (when we experience repentance).

Notice how the son comes back pleading mercy, not penance. Notice how the Father runs (quite undignified in those times) with great joy to greet his sinner-son. Notice the honor the Father gives to this son, completely unearned, all of grace.

**The Elder Son** – And yet, here is the climax, really, of the story – the whole point that Jesus is responding from vv1-2.

Instead of joining in the feast, the elder brother is angry at his father and brother (vv28-30), and insults his father by refusal to enter into the house. He is self-centered and a grumbler. He shows no more respect for his father than the younger son had, insulting the father in public.

Notice how the father does not reject the elder son but pleads with him to enter into the joy of salvation-celebration as well. But we are left not knowing whether the elder brother responded and entered into the festivities.

There is an open-invitation to the Pharisees, to the grumblers and complainers, to the finger-pointers, to those who think Jesus does not have strict enough guidelines. The invitation is to come, to throw down your self-centeredness, to stop worrying about what others think, to leave the baggage of your own “righteousness” and come to the Party of Grace.

**God Does Not Have a Problem With...** – a lot of things we have problems with.

...**Pleading with Sinners** – There is no one too dirty that Jesus will not go after.

...**Forgiving at the First Sign of Repentance** – There is no sin too detestable that Jesus has to hesitate before forgiving.

...**Throwing a Party for Sinners** – The only problem with the church is that sinners keep showing up. The Holy Trinity has no problem with them in their midst. Why do we? The Holy Trinity has no problem with spending a lot of time and resources on them. Why do we? The Holy Trinity has no problem having a party for their sake. Why do we?

...**“Humiliating” Himself** – The Father does not care what others might think when they see how glad He is to be with a sinner. He rejoices over you and me – and them.

...**Longsuffering with Folks with Problems** – Jesus is not only eating with tax collectors and sinners, but the Pharisees and scribes who are secretly devising a plan to kill Him. And Jesus keeps eating with them, inviting them, and ministering to them. *dth* – 09/24/06