

Joy in God's Heart

Luke 15:1-7 New American Standard Bible (NASB 1995)

The Lost Sheep

15 Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. **2** Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

3 So He told them this parable, saying, **4** "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? **5** When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' **7** I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Introduction

Most of us have a 'limit' to our hospitality. We love a full church, but we prefer it to be filled with people who look like us, act like us, and—most importantly—don't make us uncomfortable.

In Luke 15, Jesus is holding a dinner party, but the guest list is a scandal. The 'tax collectors and sinners' aren't just in the room; they are crowding around Him. They are leaning in to hear His every word. And in the corner, the religious elite are whispering. They are offended by His proximity to the 'wrong' people.

To the Pharisees, these people were 'trash' to be discarded. To the world, they were 'numbers' to be managed. But to Jesus, they were 'treasure' to be found.

Today, we are going to look into the very heart of God. We're going to discover that God's greatest joy isn't found in our religious rituals or our perfect attendance. **The greatest joy in the heart of God is the sound of a front door opening and a lost child finally stepping inside.**

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Are you a friend of sinners?

Now, today's text begins with the people known as "the tax collectors and the sinners" (v. 1): Jesus was accused by His opponents that He welcomed all sinners and ate with them (v. 2). In those days, and even today, eating together was the sign of acceptance and fellowship. Tax collectors were hated and despised by their own people. Because they worked for Rome, the occupying force in Israel. By the way, who are the tax collectors and the sinners in today's world? Not IRS men. But those outcast/shunned/despised in our society. E.g. Ex-convicts. Prostitutes. Weirdos. The question is: Would we welcome such people in our congregation? Jesus did and He still would.

Came near (flocked around) Jesus (v. 1): Think back to school lunchrooms. The cafeteria had invisible lines—popular kids here, outsiders there. Jesus intentionally sat at the table no one else wanted. That's why sinners flocked to Him. They felt seen, not judged. Those sinners gathered around/ hung out with Jesus. Not just to shake hands with Jesus and go away, but to listen to Him. They still do. They love Jesus, maybe not the church people. They love to hear Jesus' teaching.

The Pharisees and the scribes grumbled (v. 2): Their legalism produced pride in their hearts (Watchman Nee). They carried a "Better-than-thou" attitude towards others. They preferred Jesus to join them in their "H.M.O. Club" (Holy Members Only Club) and to shun "the sinners." Sadly, in the Church today, some of us have the same attitude. Would you grumble today if someone different from you, someone whom you may even look down on, was saved and joined God's family? It's like walking into a wedding reception where every table has a **'Reserved'** sign for the important people. The outcasts are left standing in the hallway.

When the Pharisees grumbled, they were upset that Jesus was ripping those 'Reserved' signs off the tables and giving the best seats to the people they despised. Legalism wants to reserve God for the 'deserving'; Grace gives the seat to the lost.

So, what does all of this reveal about what truly matters to God?

Church's Ultimate Concern

Math in Heaven: on the scale of God's grace, one lost soul weighs more than ninety-nine people saved. On the scale of God's joy, one repentant sinner outweighs ninety-nine

righteous ones who do not need to repent (v. 7). Human merits have no place in God's salvation. Neither does human efficiency.

Consider the shepherd who went out in search of one lost sheep. You see, some of us would rather give up on the one lost in the name of efficiency saying, *why waste time and energy? It is not worth it. It would be foolish to go out for one while leaving the rest in the wilderness.* Furthermore, we may even say, *we don't want to suffer hours of wandering under the scorching sun. Not just for one!*

Thank God that Jesus is different. He never thinks or operates that way. To Him, every soul is unique and sacred with eternal worth. One single soul is more valuable than the entire universe. Why would He do this? Because value is determined by the owner. If a woman loses a five-dollar bill, she's annoyed. But if she loses her **wedding ring**, she tears the house apart. She moves the heavy sofa and gets on her hands and knees with a flashlight. She doesn't stop until she hears that 'clink' of metal. Why? Because the ring is irreplaceable. To the world, a sinner is just another number. To God, that sinner is His wedding ring. He moves heaven and earth to find them.

Jesus loves each individual so much that He would do anything and everything to save that soul. In the story, the shepherd is deeply concerned about the lost sheep that he wouldn't mind leaving the ninety-nine in the wilderness. Likewise, Jesus the Shepherd of our soul who is madly in love with sinners so much so that He sacrificed His own life on their behalf. His love for you and me sent Him to the cross. Every lost soul is Jesus' business. So is it the Church's ultimate concern and responsibility: **saving lost souls.**

Imagine a hospital proud of its clean hallways, new equipment, and impressive staff—but strangely quiet emergency rooms. A hospital that doesn't treat the sick has forgotten its mission. Church is like a hospital for sin-sick souls. A church that stops seeking the lost has done the same.

Keep Reaching Out to the Lost/ Be Proactive

Now let's look at how the shepherd responds to the lost sheep—and what that means for us.

Value of the “Lost”: Imagine a hiker was separated from the group and goes missing, rescue teams don't stop with '99 hikers safe.' They would mobilize helicopters, dogs, and volunteers—because one life matters.

In the same way, the lost sheep was originally together with the rest of the flock. Then, it has gone astray and was separated from the shepherd. It was not found in the place where it belonged. Of course, the lost sheep here are the people who have gone astray from God for whatever reasons. Since they are a part of God's flock, Jesus wants them back to where they belong. He keeps calling them home. He says, *you are mine. My child, come home.*

Did you notice here that the shepherd didn't sit and wait until the lost sheep returned by itself? Rather, he went out in search of the lost—Likewise, we need to be proactive. We need to go out to where the lost are. No shepherd expects the lost sheep to walk back to the flock by itself. Neither should we expect the lost souls to walk into our church by themselves.

If we're honest, this has become the pattern in many churches—including ours. Too many of us have the mindset of: *We'll sit and wait until the wind blows the lost into the church.* It sometimes works, but that shouldn't be our norm. We ought to go out to the places where the lost are. We need to seek [ζητεω---zeteo—Matthew 18:12] the lost as Jesus did.

Until (v. 4)—the shepherd didn't stop his search until he found the lost. Neither should we. Sometimes, it takes years before we see one soul saved, yet it's worth our time, prayer, and efforts.

The Joy in God's Heart

Found—When the lost sheep was finally found, the shepherd was very happy (v. 5). So delighted that he **carried the sheep on his shoulders** all the way back home! Why did he do it? Perhaps, it was wounded or tired. Most likely, it doesn't know how to return home.

Think of it like a **marathon runner** who collapses just ten feet from the finish line. He can't move another inch. The crowd doesn't sit back and yell, 'Get up and finish it yourself!' Instead, the race director runs out, picks the runner up, and carries him across the line. That is the Shepherd's joy. He doesn't just find us and tell us the way home; He picks us up and carries us because we are too exhausted by our sin to walk back ourselves.

Joy of the shepherd: Did you notice that the sheep on the shepherd's shoulders contributes nothing? No apology, no effort—only its weight. And still the shepherd rejoices. So is our Heavenly Father when a sinner comes home. He rejoices over one lost soul found!

No parent says, "We already have three kids; this one isn't that exciting." Like parents celebrate every birth in the family as if it were the first, with every sinner coming home, there's a celebration in Heaven.

Rejoicing (χαίρων--chairon) (v. 5): As the shepherd rejoiced together with friends and neighbors (v. 6), so does our heavenly Father throw a welcome party in Heaven with angels, when one lost soul comes home.

Joy of the Church: Let us remember God's joy over His Church: It is not over the size of membership, not the budget, not buildings, not programs, not the cars we drive, but over the sinners who repent. So should be our joy. When our Heavenly Father rejoices over sinners coming home, so does the Church of God.

Conclusion: The Call to Action

The Shepherd in our story didn't just 'hope' the sheep would wander back. He didn't put an ad in the local paper or wait for the sheep to realize it was lost. He went out. He searched. He suffered the thorns and the heat *until* he found it.

Folks, we cannot be a 'waiting' church; we must be a 'seeking' church. We cannot be a community that only loves the ninety-nine who are already safe in the pews. If we have the heart of the Shepherd, we must have feet that are willing to get dirty.

As we bow our heads, I want to ask you three honest questions:

1. **Is there a 'Reserved' sign on your heart?** Are you holding onto a 'Better-than-thou' attitude that makes you a barrier instead of a bridge to the Gospel?
2. **Do you see the value?** When you look at the person in your life who is furthest from God—the 'weirdo,' the outcast, the difficult neighbor—do you see a nuisance, or do you see a soul that is more valuable than the entire universe?
3. **Who is your 'One'?** I'm asking the Holy Spirit right now to put a specific name in your mind. One friend. One coworker. One family member. One neighbor. As the Holy Spirit gives you that name, I want you to write it down. Put it in your phone, on a sticky note, or on the back of your bulletin. Don't let that name leave your heart without a commitment to pray for them this week.

Don't just pray for them. Reach out to them. Because when that person turns toward home, all of Heaven stops what it's doing to throw a party. Let's be a church that gives Heaven a reason to celebrate.

Let us pray. Lord, grant us Your heart that cares about the lost. Grant us Your mercies and compassion for the outcast. Open our eyes to see the lost as You do. Lead our feet to those who need to be in Your fold. And fill our church with Your joy—the joy of the lost coming home. In Christ's name, Amen.