

Text: Luke 15:1-32

Title: “Jesus, Friend of Lost Sinners”

Preached by Michael Dean, Matt Geddie and Daniel Dickard

VIDEO – JESUS, FRIEND OF SINNERS

MICHAEL DEAN

Let's open our Bibles today to Luke 15 as we wrap up this series “Jesus, Friend of Sinners.” Here we have one of the most familiar teachings of Jesus in the entire Bible. It's actually wrapped around three parables or one parable with three parts ... a trilogy.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION – For those of you who enjoy movies, what are some of your favorite trilogies? I think about “Toy Story” 1,2 and 3; or “Back to the Future” 1,2 and 3; or the original “Star Wars” trilogy; or “The Lord of the Rings” trilogy.

Well if you asked people, even those who aren't all that familiar with the Bible, what parables they know best, at the top of the list would probably be this trilogy in Luke 15 about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. Jesus always had a purpose for the stories He told. Our college minister Matt Geddie and our interim student minister Daniel Dickard have helped me in this series and today together we'll unpack these stories.

Luke 15:1 - Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him.

These “tax collectors and ‘sinners’” were a class of people that respectable religious people despised. But Jesus loved them, and they knew it. And they loved being around Jesus because He really cared about them. More importantly Jesus engaged them with a redemptive purpose in mind. He loved them as they were, but He loved them too much to leave them as they were.

ILLUSTRATION – Suppose you're sitting in a restaurant and a person is seated at the table next to you. You observe that this person is wearing the clothes of a woman, but the build of their body and their facial appearance are clearly those of a man. What might be your first instinct? Do you think about asking the server to move you to another table, or even of leaving the restaurant? Do you mutter under your breath, “That's disgusting”? Or does your heart break? You wonder what their story is. You might even be inclined to turn around and start a conversation with them before your food arrives. From what I know of Jesus, that's probably what *He* would have done.

Luke 15:2 - But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Pharisees and teachers of the law were the supremely religious people who prided themselves in their purity and righteousness. So they isolated themselves from these kinds of despicable

people. And they judged others who didn't. Look at their accusation of Jesus: "This man welcomes sinners..." That's an incredibly important thought that will help us to unlock the meaning of these stories that Jesus tells. What do you do when you welcome someone? It's what you do when a friend knocks on the door of your apartment. You open the door and let them in. You're glad to see them. That's a welcome. What you see in the life and ministry of Jesus is what we will call today the "welcoming heart of God." So we understand that...

1. THE WELCOMING HEART OF GOD IS REVEALED IN JESUS CHRIST (vv.1-2).

But here's the huge challenge: How can a holy God "welcome" or "receive" sinful human beings. The only way that is possible is for God to reconcile us to Himself. And He did that by sending His Son Jesus Christ to die on the Cross so that when sinners like us put our trust in Him, repenting of our sins, God welcomes and receives us to Himself, And Jesus came to reveal that welcoming heart of God. But again, the elite religious people criticized and despised Jesus for this. And v.3 says that Jesus confronted their attitude by telling these stories.

As you scan vv.4-7 let me summarize the story for us: Sheep served a vital function in the culture of the Bible ... for food, for sacrificial offerings, for clothing. So the shepherds who took care of them were just as vital. Imagine in a field, say, outside of Bethlehem, a flock of sheep is grazing. It comes time to bring the sheep into the pen for safety at night. This flock contains 100 sheep, but now one of them is missing. What does the shepherd do? Does he write off that lost sheep, and take the others into the pen for the night? No! Every sheep is valuable, so he leaves the 99, possibly for another shepherd to watch and he goes on a search for the one lost sheep. He searches every cave and crevice until, sure enough, he recovers this sheep that has strayed. By now the sheep is probably tired and so the shepherd raises the sheep up on to his shoulders and marches back to the pen where the other sheep have been left. His heart is happy that he has found the lost sheep, and when he comes within shouting distance of the others he lets out a whoop: "Hey guys, great news. I've found my lost sheep!"

Then Jesus drives home the point of the story:

Luke 15:7 - I 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 the welcoming heart of God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. He came to seek and to save people who are lost. But Jesus intends to drive the truth home with another story.

MATT GEDDIE

2. THE WELCOMING HEART OF GOD PURSUES WHAT IS LOST.

It's in vv.8-10 where we see this truth come to life! **Read Luke 15:8-10.** "The Parable of the Lost Coin"

In this parable, the woman does not just “write the coin off as lost” and move forward by caring nothing about it.

Why? Because something of “extreme value” is lost. It’s safe to assume that Jesus isn’t referring to our “modern day value of a penny” in this parable.

During Jesus’ day it was custom for a “married” woman to communicate her married status by wearing a silver chain that adorned silver coins on it. To us, this would be our modern day wedding ring. Which is undoubtedly an extremely precious ornament, which in this story accounts for an impactful loss.

So here’s what we know...

- Separated from Christ, you and I are both extremely lost and extremely valuable.
- Because we’re both lost & valuable...God will do anything to bring you home.
- You are God’s coin, his treasure, therefore He pursues you.

So why does Jesus associate with sinners? Because God wants to recover His things that are lost.

Why should we, like Jesus, associate with sinners? Because God wants to recover His things that are lost ... through you!

How? Like Jesus...

- We associate with people without adopting their practices.
- We are to be the light of the world, in the world, but not of the world. The boat is in the water but the water is not in the boat.

By associating with sinners and not adopting their practices...we’re to lock in on laboring for the lost. Just like the woman in the parable is laboring for the lost coin, we’re to recognize God’s pursuing power and “join with him” in pursuing that which is lost.

We imitate the woman’s response when what’s lost becomes found? We share in the same joy that sweeps the Heavens when the lost is found. (vs. 9-10). What takes place in Heaven when a lost sinner becomes a saint? They rejoice: “There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (vs. 10)

WHY DO WE REJOICE when someone **REPENTS**? Because repentance highlights redemption... And redemption points to the reality of the cross ... therefore we rejoice. You & I share in this joy / rejoicing because we too know what it means to be saved by grace. To the degree that you labor for the lost; it’s to that degree that you will readily rejoice.

ILLUSTRATION: Beach Reach

DANIEL DICKARD

The Luke 15 parable is one of the most well-known stories in all the Bible. It is, arguably, the most popular parable that Jesus spoke. For such a well-known parable, the set-up appears sterile. It seems boring. Perhaps even non-suspenseful.

But, the set-up is brilliant. It is intuitive. Luke is showing us increasing value by decreasing number. The first part of the Luke 15 parable involves one-hundred sheep. The second-part of the Luke 15 parable includes ten coins. The Parable of the Prodigal Son, however, focuses on two sons.

Whereas the first part of the parable has agricultural value and the second part has monetary value, the final part of the Luke 15 parable has familial and sentimental value.

So, with this brilliant set-up, Luke says ... **Read Luke 15:11-24.**

Here's the point of this part of the story:

3. THE WELCOMING HEART OF GOD RESTORES WHAT IS BROKEN (vv.11-24).

The Father desires to reconcile us to himself through Christ. This process of reconciliation, however, breaks down when we fail to apply two fundamental and pivotal truths. Failure to affirm the two truths which proceed from the Luke 15 narrative will short-circuit God's reconciliatory work in our life.

1) We must acknowledge the depths of our depravity.

Biblical confession is not emotional remorse. It is not negative feelings towards an action. The Greek word for confession, *homolego*, is a compound verb. *Homo* means "the same." *Lego* means to speak. In other words, biblical confession is agreeing with God's truth. It is aligning our lips with God's Word. We must acknowledge our sin, just like the younger son in the Luke 15 parable, in order to receive God's forgiveness.

2) We must receive the Father's heart.

The heart of the problem is the problem of the heart. In short, we, as humans, need a new heart transplant. Our hearts are frail and weak. Yet, because of what God in Christ has done for us on the cross, we can be the recipients of a new heart.

ILLUSTRATION - Did you hear about Jeni Stepien's wedding? Jeni Stepien got married on August 8, 2016 in New Jersey. Unfortunately, her father, Michael Stepien, was unable to walk her down the aisle because he was brutally murdered in 2006. Just prior to his death, Michael Stepien registered as an organ donor and Michael's heart was later donated to Arthur Thomas, who had waited 16 years for a heart transplant. So, on Jeni Stepien's wedding day, Arthur Thomas, the man who received her father's heart transplant, walked her down the aisle.

This story is a beautiful picture of the Gospel. A man received the father's heart and walked down the aisle with the bride. When we receive the father's heart we walk with the bride, Jesus Christ.

MICHAEL DEAN

Now the story of the lost son takes an unexpected twist. Jesus could have ended the story there if all He was speaking to was the "sinners" in the crowd. But remember Jesus has another audience before Him ... the elite religious people who despised "sinners." Remember that the parable says the father had *two* sons. So the other son comes into focus here.

Read Luke 15:25-27.

The words "he has him back" in v.27 translate the same word that is used back in v.2 when the religious leaders criticized Jesus because He "welcomes" sinners and eats with them. The servant reports to the older brother, "Your father has welcomed your little brother home safe and sound." So here we see yet another aspect of the welcoming heart of the Father.

4. THE WELCOMING HEART OF GOD REJOICES WHEN THE LOST ONE RETURNS (vv.7,10,24,32).

We've seen it repeatedly in the stories. **Read vv.7, 10 and 24.** But again, not everyone was rejoicing.

Luke 15:28 - "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

The elder brother doesn't rejoice because he doesn't have the welcoming heart of his father. His heart is not in sync with his father's heart and so he won't go in and join the celebration, even when his father pleads with him. The son says...

Luke 15:29a - 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.

Does that sound like a loving son relating to an adoring father? The Pharisees couldn't miss the application here. They saw their good works and religious zeal as an attempt to please God like a slave obeys the orders of a master. But God wants more; He wants our hearts to love Him. God isn't honored by that slavish obedience, but by child-like faith and love. The son goes on...

Luke 15:29b-30 - Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

Notice “this son of yours” ... not “my brother,” but “this son of yours.” He’s not just mad at his little brother; he’s mad at his father. He’s questioning the goodness and welcoming grace of his own father. The frightening thing is that many of us will read this and think, “You know, the big brother has a legitimate beef here. That father should have been a little rougher on that rebellious little brother.”

As I said last week, “I need to see the Pharisee in me.” Is the reason that I have a hard time loving and welcoming people with messed up lives simply that I’m trying hard to please God and when I see Him loving and welcoming someone who isn’t even trying ... well, that’s just not fair. If God always did the fair thing, none of us could stand in His presence.

Amazingly, in the story the father responded toward the older son with grace and mercy.

Luke 15:31 - “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.’ ”

As the older son, his inheritance is greater than the other children. He gets it all. But the older son didn’t treasure all that his father had given to him. And it’s true for many of us as faithful, church-going people. We’re like the older son in the parable; we live in the house with the Father but we don’t treasure all that He has given us in Jesus. And we’re not satisfied in the grace, goodness and mercy of our Father. So we don’t rejoice in what He rejoices in. Here again is the welcoming heart of the Father:

Luke 15:32 - But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”

Listen, there is no greater joy for the Father than when people are saved. And if we have the welcoming heart of the Father we will experience true joy at what brings joy to the Father. There will be joy in our hearts when we have the welcoming heart of the Father. There will be joy in our church when we have the welcoming heart of our Father for sinners.

We’re speaking to people today who are like that lost little brother. You’ve run from God for too long. It’s time to come home to God who will welcome you.

We’re speaking to people who are like the older brother. You’re a good church-going person, but your heart is far from the welcoming heart of God. You can come home today as well.