

Luke 15 – Three Types of Sinners

Introduction

Have you noticed that whenever the Pharisees or other pious Jewish authorities accuse Jesus of associating with “sinners”, that Jesus never denies that they’re sinners? His response is always the same, that He’s come to save the lost. Have you also noticed that whenever a person or group approaches Christ in whom He detects an issue of sin, He always addresses it; Christ always discerns the spiritual condition of each soul He meets and, even if **THEY** don’t know it, points them toward their real need: Salvation. In this chapter Jesus provides 3 types of sinners and the different approaches God takes to reconcile them to Himself. It’s very important to note that this is the common result in each example: God’s desire that all sinners be reconciled back to Him. Note that there is no mention here of final judgment.

¹Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. ²Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

[Read 1-2]

Q: Compare and contrast the ways in which the Pharisees and Jesus each treated sinners. What’s the chief difference?

A: The Pharisees ostracized sinners, avoiding all contact; Jesus embraced sinners, bringing them within reach.

Q: So what kind of “outreach” program did the Pharisees employ to reach sinners for God?

A: None. It was completely left up to the individual to accomplish on his own.

³So 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? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And 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!’ ⁷I 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.

[Read 3-7]

Q: 99 out of 100 sheep know it’s in their best interest to stay with the Shepherd and the safety of the flock. So what is the condition of the wandering sheep? What type of sinner does this represent?

A: The sinner in his stupidity. (Sorry if this isn’t politically correct. Let me know of a better word.) They wander off against all common sense and rationality. Have you known anyone like this?

⁸“Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!’ ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

[Read 8-10]

Q: It's not known exactly when and where the coin went missing. What type of sinner does this represent?

A: The sinner unconscious of his lost condition. Have you known anyone like this?

Q: In both cases, Who knows that there's a lost sinner needing to be found?

A: God.

Q: Was either the sheep or the coin trying to find its way home?

A: No, God actively searched **them** out.

Point: *These parables represent the seeking love of God. This is quite a contrast to the Pharisees' approach to have nothing to do with sinners. They sought to go as far away in the opposite direction of sinners; Christ goes out of His way to look for them. The Pharisees saw God's laws as a measuring stick to compare each other with and missed God's many admonitions that the law is "love" both towards God and for their neighbors.*

Application: How can we act more like Christ to those that become the lost sheep or coin?

[Read 11-15]

¹¹And He said, “A man had two sons. ¹²“The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ So he divided his wealth between them. ¹³And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.

¹⁴Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

Q: What can we divine from verse 12 as to the root cause of this young man's request?

A: He no longer wants to be under another's authority. As a type of sinner he's seeking to be out from under divine control in order to be his own master. Have we ever been like that or known someone the same?

Q: He probably thought to throw off the heavy yoke of his father for the light yoke of being his own master. But what was the actual result?

A: He came under the much heavier yoke of worldly masters who neither cared for him nor had an inheritance for him. (See Matthew 11:28-30)

Q: “Loose living” is a polite way of saying “prostitutes”. To what does the Old Testament equate harlotry?

A: In the OT harlotry = idolatry. The complete turning of one's back on God. The condition being described is that of someone knowingly choosing a replacement for God, not stupidly wandering off or unconscious of the point at which they became lost.

Q: He is in another country where the Mosaic law is not practiced. Back in his father's country would he have gotten a job herding swine?

A: No. These were considered unclean animals.

Q: So what is the significance of becoming a swine herder?

A: He has completely turned his back on **everything** – first forsaking his father's authority, forsaking God to embrace idolatry (self over God), and finally forsaking all the Law.

Q: What is the main difference between the sheep and coin compared to the prodigal son? What type of sinner does he represent?

A: The sinner that is **KNOWINGLY** and **WILLINGLY** estranged from God.

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¹⁶And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. ¹⁷But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'"

[Read 16-19]

Q: What does it finally take to turn him around? At what point does he realize the truth of his situation?

A: When there's no one caring for him. He started out to use the world but it's ended up using him. It's the condition of an idolater as described in Jeremiah 30:14, "All your lovers have forgotten you, they do not seek you; for I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the punishment of a cruel one, because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous."

Q: OT Kings for \$500, Alex – Who was an example of the prodigal son?

A: Manasseh. (2 Chronicles 33:11-13)

Point: This should not have been a "new" story to the Pharisees. They not only had examples such as Manasseh, but numerous Scriptural references that God would accept anyone back regardless of the depth of their sin provided that they turned back to him with all their heart. This was one of the most repeated concepts in the OT. There are too many references to list, but for example, Jeremiah 2:19, "Your own wickedness will correct you, and your apostasies will reprove you; know therefore and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God, and the dread of Me is not in you," declares the Lord God of hosts." Jesus reinforces the OT teaching that no matter how far anyone goes in sin, they can always return to God if they seek Him.

Q: In rehearsing what he will say to his father in verses 18 and 19, is it his intention to renounce his sonship and become a hired hand?

A: His request will be reconciliation as a son but treatment as one of the servants. He's not simply returning to a home or an assured meal ticket but is going to make amends for the first, original sin in seeking to break from his father's authority. Remember David's confession, "Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in Your sight..." (Psalm 51:4)

²⁰So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

[Read 20-24]

Q: Does God make those returning come and grovel and plead for reconciliation?

A: While the returning son was still far off and far from view his father goes out to meet him.

²²But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; ²³and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

Q: Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dream Coat for \$1,000, Alex – What dramatic OT events used this same set of terms which literally mean, "he fell on his neck and kissed him"?

A: Both when Joseph was reconciled to his brother Benjamin after all the years of isolation in Egypt, and again when Joseph saw his father Israel again. The imagery is the same as Joseph, having completely forgiven and forgotten the injustices and hardships inflicted on him, only to receive his lost brother and father in complete joy.

Q: What do you suppose the things the father presents the returning son – the robe, the ring, the sandals – represent?

A: These are OT symbols of forgiveness of sin (the new robe), sonship and authority of the father (the ring), and as slaves went barefoot, the mark of freedom (the sandals) from one's sinful past.

Q: In the first 2 parables God is the seeker. Who is the seeker in this parable?

A: The sinner himself since he willfully and knowingly separated from God. Whereas the first 2 parables show the seeking love of God, this parable shows the receiving love of God. The Pharisees practiced neither.

Q: What is the common response to all 3 sinners in this chapter?

A: Joyous celebration at their return.

[Read 25-32]

Q: Is the elder son incorrect in any of his assertions to the father?

A: No, but that isn't really the issue.

Q: What is wrong with his assertion about not ever having a party with his own friends?

A: It's a focus on worldly rewards, desiring something in the here and now instead of relying on the faith and knowledge of his greater, future reward.

Point: From a certain perspective it's a test of faith for **BOTH** parties – for the sinner to return to the assurance of reconciliation in this life, and for the saint's assurance of his reward in the next. The Pharisees, for instance, were consumed with **THIS** life's rewards. Like the prodigal son, they were spending everything they were ever going to get.

Suggestion: Close with group prayer for the return of specific individuals in our field of vision and for ourselves to focus on things from the right perspective.

²⁵“Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. ²⁷And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him.

²⁹“But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; ³⁰but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’

³¹“And he said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’”