

Lost and Found: The Joy of Redemption

Verses 1–2: The Divide Between the Desperate and the Disdainful

“Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man receives sinners and eats with them.’” (Luke 15:1–2, NKJV)

Jesus was attracting the very people the religious elite avoided—the broken, the shamed, the moral outcasts. Tax collectors were viewed as traitors and thieves, working for the oppressive Roman regime and skimming off the top. “Sinners” referred to anyone who had fallen short of religious respectability, including prostitutes, thieves, and others the Pharisees deemed spiritually unworthy.

But these people were drawn to Jesus. Why? Because He gave them something no one else would: dignity, hope, and the promise of grace. He listened to them. He touched them. He ate with them. And in that culture, sharing a meal was more than nourishment—it was fellowship. It meant, *“You matter to Me. I want to be with you.”*

The Pharisees and scribes didn’t just dislike Jesus for this; they were scandalized. To them, righteousness meant separation from sinners. But Jesus came to draw near to the lost, not to distance Himself from them. What the Pharisees meant as an accusation—*“He receives sinners and eats with them”*—is actually one of the most beautiful summaries of the gospel.

Personal Application: Do I welcome the broken like Jesus did? Or am I more like the Pharisee, looking down at others from a perch of spiritual pride? Am I more concerned with holiness or compassion—when Jesus demonstrated both perfectly?

Verses 3–7: The Lost Sheep

Jesus responds to their criticism with a parable:

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?” (v. 4)

The shepherd’s love is relentless. He doesn’t shrug and say, “Oh well, I still have ninety-nine.” No, he *goes after* the one. And when he finds it, he doesn’t scold or shame it—he lifts it on his shoulders and rejoices.

Jesus concludes:

“There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.” (v. 7)

Heaven throws a party when the lost are found. But the religious leaders didn’t want a party. They wanted punishment. Jesus wanted restoration.

Personal Application: Am I celebrating when God’s grace reaches the broken? Or do I question whether they deserve it? God’s heart rejoices over one repenting sinner—so should mine.

Verses 8–10: The Lost Coin

Jesus offers a second parable¹, this time of a woman who loses a coin—perhaps part of her bridal dowry. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, searches every corner, and when she finds it, she calls her friends to celebrate.

“There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (v. 10)

God rejoices in recovery, not just preservation.

Personal Application: Do I share God’s passion for pursuing the one? Or have I grown cold, focusing only on the “ninety-nine” already inside the fold?

Verses 11–24: The Prodigal Son

This third and most famous parable is the climax of Jesus’ response. A father has two sons. The younger son asks for his share of the inheritance—essentially saying, *“I wish you were dead so I could get my money now.”* Shockingly, the father gives it to him.

The son squanders it all in “riotous living” (likely including immoral excess), and when a famine hits, he’s left broke, broken, and feeding pigs—a job repugnant to any Jew.

“But when he came to himself...” (v. 17)

This is the turning point of the story—and of every sinner’s life. He realizes even his father’s hired servants are better off. He rehearses a speech of repentance and makes his way home.

But before he can even get there, the father sees him from afar, runs to him, and embraces him. The son starts his confession, but the father interrupts with restoration: a robe, a ring, sandals, and a feast.

Personal Application: This is your story and mine. We’ve all wandered. We’ve all squandered. But when we turn to God, we find a Father running toward us, not away from us. His grace isn’t reluctant—it’s lavish.

Verses 25–32: The Elder Brother

Now comes the real sting of the parable—for the Pharisees. The older brother hears the celebration and is furious. “I’ve been faithful,” he protests, “and you never threw a party for me.”

The father gently corrects him:

“Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad...” (vv. 31–32)

¹ A **New Testament parable** is a short, simple story that Jesus used to teach a spiritual or moral lesson by comparing a familiar earthly situation to a deeper heavenly truth.

The word *parable* comes from the Greek word *parabolē*, meaning “to place alongside” or “to compare.” In a parable, Jesus would set a common experience (like farming, fishing, family relationships, or business) next to a profound spiritual reality, inviting His hearers to think deeply and respond personally.

The older son is a portrait of the Pharisees—outwardly obedient, inwardly bitter. He cannot rejoice because he cannot forgive. His relationship with the father was transactional, not intimate. He served without delight, obeyed without love, and when grace was extended to someone unworthy, it exposed the jealousy in his own heart.

Personal Application: Am I the older brother? Do I view grace as unfair? Do I begrudge others' blessings? Or do I celebrate every sinner who finds their way home?

Final Reflections

All three parables share a pattern:

1. Something is lost—a sheep, a coin, a son.
2. Someone goes searching—a shepherd, a woman, and a father who waits and watches.
3. Something is found—and there is great rejoicing.

Jesus told these stories not just to warm our hearts but to challenge our attitudes. The real question is: how do I respond when Jesus receives sinners?

Let's not be found sulking outside the party like the older brother. Let's go inside and celebrate with the Father. Because we were once lost, and now we are found.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, thank You for seeking and saving the lost—thank You for finding me. Help me never to look down on anyone You're lifting up. Keep me from the spirit of the Pharisee, and fill my heart with the joy of heaven over every soul that repents. Let me rejoice in Your grace wherever it shows up—in my ekklesia, in another church, in the streets, or in places I wouldn't expect. In Your name, Amen.*