

LUKE 15.1-10: IT'S PERSONAL

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by Thomas John Dexter
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The NIV was used for this sermon in order to accommodate to the preferred version of the congregation addressed.

Good morning, saints! [It's a] pleasure to see all these wonderful faces here this morning.

In reverence of the LORD and His word, let us all stand. And if we would, let us take our pew Bibles and turn to page 740 whereat we will find Luke chapter 15. With the time we have this morning we will be focusing on the first ten verses, primarily the first seven.

[Luke 15.1-10] Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 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.

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

[Prayer:] Please, Father, glorify Yourself through the proper exposition of Your word. Stand guard at my lips so that I faithfully represent You and Your word, that we may be convicted, corrected, and edified. Amen.

You may be seated.

Within Luke chapter 15 verses 1-10, the Greek word translated by the NIV as "sinners" and "sinner" appears four times: verses 1, 2, 7, and 10.

The Greek word translated as "loses" and "lost" appears five times: verse 4 where it appears twice, and verses 6, 8, and 9.

The words translated as "joyfully," "rejoice with," and "rejoicing" appear five times: verses 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10.

And the word translated as "finds" and "found" appears six times: verses 4, 5, 6, 8, and twice in verse 9.

Based on those keywords we can see four points in verses 1-10:

Point 1. the object lost

Point 2. the personal interest of another in the object that is lost

Point 3. the object found

Point 4. the rejoicement over the recovery of the object that was lost

This last point is the main point. We see it in verse 7: "there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents"; and we see it also in verse 10: "there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Let us begin the exposition and examination of the text.

Luke 15.1: "Now the tax collectors and 'sinners' were all gathering around to hear him."

They were all gathering around Jesus.

This is not the first time that the tax collectors and the sinners were seen with Jesus. An earlier occasion is recorded in Mark chapter 2 verses 15 and 16 where it reads, "While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and 'sinners' were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the 'sinners' and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and "sinners"?"

We might be asking ourselves, "Why are the tax collectors distinguished from the sinners in these verses? Were not the tax collectors sinners too?" Yes. Yes they were, and in The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector scribed at Luke chapter 18 verses 9-14 we find a certain tax collector humbly confessing himself as just that. Luke 18.13 reads, "[T]he tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but [he] beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'"

The tax collectors are distinguished from the sinners at the occasions of Mark 2.15 and 16 and Luke 15.1 perhaps because they were held in particular contempt by the Jews. The tax collectors worked for the Gentiles, they worked for Rome, and because of such they were viewed as traitors to their own people. In the self-righteous eyes of both the scribes and the Pharisees, the lowest of the low were coming to Jesus.

Luke 15.2: "But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"

Convinced of their own righteousness, convinced of their own right standing with God, especially in contrast with the actions and beliefs of others, both the Pharisees and the scribes distinguished themselves from sinners. The Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling (and possibly emphatically, forcefully) about the very thing that Jesus came to earth to do: "[T]he Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19.10).

Luke 15.3: "Then Jesus told them this parable:"

The parable was told because of or in response to the content of the grumbling in verse 2. Here, on this occasion, Jesus responds with a parable. But at Mark 2 verse 17 He responds with the proverb, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." Then Jesus explained the proverb with, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

What exactly are we to understand by "parable"? First, the English word "parable" is not a translation, it is a transliteration of the Greek παραβολή. What this means is that the English word "parable" does not tell us what the Greek παραβολή means. "Parable" is merely the English spelling of the Greek παραβολή.

Παραβολή is a compound, it is a combination of two words. This first is παρά which carries the basic sense of "beside, parallel to, alongside." And the second word, βάλλω which generally means to "throw" or to "cast" but it can also mean to "put, place, set, lay," etc. So a παραβολή or "parable" is "a setting of one thing beside another," "a putting of one thing alongside another," "a laying of one thing parallel with another." And why would that be done? To form a comparison or illustration.

According to Grant [R.] Osborne in his book *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (p. 292) Jesus' parables "center on life situations as illustrating kingdom realities." Think of this. A number of times in the gospel According to Matthew, Jesus would begin a parable with "the kingdom of heaven is like" then follow with a life situation to illustrate divine truth.

Now it is unwise to press the details of a parable too hard, if at all. The danger of such is that of becoming lost in conjecture. This is to say, with interpreting parables comes the danger, if one is not careful, of drawing conclusions based upon guesswork.

For example, it has been said that the lost sheep in Luke 15.4, because it's a living creature, it has a brain, eh, this might represent those who *know* that they are "incomplete," they *know* something is missing from their lives; yet all their efforts to fill that void and find themselves result in failure. It has also been said that, unlike the sheep, the coin in Luke 15.8 is an inanimate object, it has no brain. So this might represent those who are lost and don't even know it, like those who are members of and possibly were even raised in a church and have a Christian background but have no relationship with either the Savior or His Church. They may be "near" to Christ in the sense of their church membership, but all they have is a coattail religion, a false sense of hope, a false sense of security.

As far as I'm concerned, all of that seems to be reading meaning into the details of the text. This we will not do. Suffice it to say the main point is rejoicement in Heaven over one's repentance that leads to salvation.

Now let's begin examining the parable.

Luke 15.4: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"

Notice first, the object lost is one sheep, illustrative of one sinner. Not a mass of sinners, just one.

Second, notice the personal interest of another in the object that is lost. The man leaves the ninety-nine and goes after this one lost sheep. Further documenting this man's personal interest in the object lost is the type of search conducted. This is no cursory, hurried, hasty search. The man does not stop—until he finds it.

[Luke 15 v]erse 5: "And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders"

His search does not end in failure. The man succeeds in finding the object of personal interest to him. And not one negative word comes from his mouth. The man doesn't upbraid or revile the creature: "You stupid sheep! What are you doing out here when you're supposed to be over there?" Nor does the man drive it back home with a staff or beat it as if to say, "Now get back over there! Move it!" No. At the recovery of the object that was lost, out from within the man comes neither rebuke nor reprimand nor reproach, but rejoicing!

The man joyfully puts the sheep on his shoulders.

[Luke 15 v]erse 6: "and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'"

"Rejoice with": The context is suggestive of a joy marked by enthusiastic happiness or festive happiness. "Festive happiness" meaning you're so happy that you have found what was lost that you throw a feast, a festival, or a celebration so that you may enjoy your happiness with others. This is the very thing we see later on in verses 21 and 24.

In [Luke 15] verse 21 we see the sinner repenting: "The son said to him [to his father], 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" And then the festive happiness over the sinner repenting is seen in [Luke 15] verse 24 where the father says, "'[T]his son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

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."

Is this to say that some people don't need to repent? No. The context indicates Jesus' words are ironical. There is a sharp difference between the mindset of both the scribes and the Pharisees and

what is really true. While both the scribes and the Pharisees *thought* they were righteous and had no need of repentance, just the opposite was true.

Think of the attitude of the prayer of the Pharisee in The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18 verses 9-14. We referred to Luke 18.13 earlier, the attitude of the prayer of the tax collector, but now take a look at verses 11 and 12: "The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'"

There's no need of repentance in the mind of this man!

But what does Luke 18.14 tell us? "I [Jesus] tell you that this man,—Which man? The Pharisee? No! The tax collector, the one who stood at a distance, the one who would not even look up to heaven, the one who beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner!"—this man [the tax collector], rather than the other [the Pharisee], went home justified before God," went home in a state of having been put in the right with God!

What does this tell us of the Pharisee then? It tells us that despite his prayer, despite his mindset, despite his sense of no need of repentance, despite his claims—Even if his claims are true!—he went home in the wrong with God—all because he was not willing to agree with God that, yes, he was a sinner in need of God's mercy.

What about you? What about me? Are we trusting in ourselves, even to a degree, that we are righteous? Because I'm gonna tell you, "[T]hat unless [our] righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, [we] will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5.20).

If you are hoping to or trusting that you will enter the kingdom of heaven because you're not as bad as someone else, you are going to walk out that door and go home in the wrong with God—except on the condition that you repent as the tax collector! And I tell you, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over you and your repentance than over ninety-nine persons who do not need to repent!

Now one might say, "Well, Thomas, Jesus died in behalf of all. It's not as personal as you're making this out to be. Second Corinthians 5.14 and 15 say He 'died for all.' First Timothy 2.6 says He 'gave himself as a ransom for all.' Hebrews 2.9 says He experienced death 'for everyone.' Even John 10.11 says He laid 'down his life for the sheep' plural!"

Now this is true. It is true that One died in behalf of all, but think of the man in this parable. He has 100 sheep. For the sake of illustration, consider a person today who has, say, many pets. If we were to make the comment, "You have a *lot* of pets," the pet owner would likely reply, "Yes, I love them all." The person holds an all-embracing love for the pets, love for them all.

But, what if *one* of those pets goes missing? Will not the pet owner be crying out, "Bristol! Bristol! Where are you?" "Georgette! Georgette! Please come home, Georgette!"

That is personal love! Personal concern! Personal interest! So, too, it is with Jesus for those whom the Father has given to Him!

Galatians 2.19-20: "[T]hrough the law I [Paul] died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

That is personal substitution!

And because Jesus, out of His personal love for Paul, voluntarily substituted Himself for him, the Just for the unjust, Jesus bore the blame, was wounded, crushed, endured the punishment, bled, and died, paying the penalty as though He Himself were personally responsible for every single one of

Paul's sins! Think of it. Picture it! And while doing so, consider that if perchance the actual Christian commits an act of sin willfully, it is tantamount to standing before the Cross, seeing your substitute suffering, and telling God the Father to crush the Christ harder!

It is more than personal substitution. It is personal mercy. "Even though I [Paul] was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy" (1 Timothy 1.13).

When the blessed Lord Jesus Christ went to His execution, yes, One died in behalf of all; but it is also true that He died for each of His Own individually.

Not only personal substitution; not only personal mercy; but also personal indwelling!

John 6.56: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I [Jesus] in him."

Singular! In the individual person!

John 15.5: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I [Jesus] in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

1 John 3.24 (more correctly from the New American Standard Bible): "And the one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him."

1 John 4.15: "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God."

1 John 4.16: "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him."

You, each one of you who have been fathered by God, you are an object of personal concern, personal importance, an object of personal love. And that is why God went after you *personally* to find you *personally*, to rescue you *personally* from the eternal destruction you deserve for having wandered from the path, being unable to find the way.

Continuing on.

Luke 15.8: "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?"

It is not that God doesn't know where you are and has to search diligently all over the place. ("Come on, where are you? Where have you gone? You were just here. Where did you go?") No. That is not the point. The point is that God *will* find you—wherever you are at! Regardless of how far gone you might be, if you are one of His He will find you.

[Luke 15 v]erse 9[-10]: "And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Those of you present, those of you listening who have soundly been saved, there was celebration in Heaven over your personal salvation!

As we can see, this search, too, does not end in failure. And all the Father gives to the Son will never be lost again.

John 10.27-29: "My sheep listen to my voice; I [Jesus] know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

John 6.37-40: All that the Father gives [to] me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I

[Jesus] will never drive away. For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

In 1778, German hymnist Henriette Luise von Hayn penned what came to be known in English as "I Am Jesus' Little Lamb." Allow me to close with the first stanza of this hymn, and take special note of just how personal she saw Jesus being with the individual believer.

*I am Jesus' little lamb,
Ever glad at heart I am;
For my Shepherd gently guides me,
Knows my need, and well provides me,
Loves me every day the same,
Even calls me by my name.¹*

[Prayer:] Almighty God, how can we respond to such personal love, to such personal interest, to such personal mercy and substitution and indwelling? O God, please bless these truths to our hearts so that we may live more for You, that we may express more and more gratitude to You for what You have done for sinners who but by Your mercy would be eternally damned. Thank You for Your word, Father. Thank You for rescuing us. In the holy, precious name of Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

1. Emphasis added.