



FOR JOY • The Lost Sheep and Lost Coin

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Luke 15:1-10

We're in the middle of a series in Luke in which Jesus is continuing His long trek to Jerusalem and the cross awaits Him there. In chapter 15 we have a three story package that informs why He is resolutely marching to His own execution.

The stories are about lost things that needs to be found: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. In this lesson we'll be looking at the first two, which in some way, serve as a set up for the climactic third.

This collection of parables is set in the not untypical circumstance of Jesus being criticized by the Pharisees. They were muttering about the company Jesus keeps. You know the type – sinners, immoral people – people like us.

Time Bomb Parables

As He often did, He chose to respond to the critique with some parables – not so much a direct attack, more of an end run around their flank. Stories are powerful, especially when told by someone as skillful as Jesus. His tended to be like time bombs. When you hear the story it seems innocuous enough and so you let it in and accept its point. Then later that day while you are walking home you realize that it was about you and – Boom – it's too late. The story has penetrated your defenses and left it's mark on you.

As you read these parables, be careful. We'll get to this later in the series, but I had one go off on me earlier this semester – about a day after I taught on this concept. Jesus is a tricky guy.

Generally speaking a parable has one point. They aren't allegories in which everything is symbolic. Instead they are stories in which the details support a primary overriding lesson. Your job this week will be to help the people in your group figure out Jesus' core message.

Lost Sheep and Lost Coin

Keeping in mind the set up in vv. 1-2, take a second and read vv. 3-7 and see what you think is the point of the parable. Give yourself a chance to look at it before I give you some clues in the next paragraph.

Got any theories? Here's a hint. Jesus is responding to their muttering. The question implicit in that muttering is, "Why do you hang out with losers?" That's what is bugging them so Jesus sets out to answer it. The purpose of this parable and the next is to answer the question, "Why do you hang out with losers?" If you want to know why He does, scan back through the story and see if any repeated terms catch your eye.

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What's the Big Idea?

When confronted by the Pharisees for spending His time with sinners, Jesus responds by telling stories to illustrate why He does it: for joy. God delights in our repentance.

What's the Problem?

Our hearts are slow to believe that God could really delight in repentance. This can cause us to look down on people who need to repent, not seeing that God loves them and wants to be with them. And it can cause us to fear to go to Him with our own sin believing that He may be more annoyed than delighted with us.



In case the answer isn't clear yet, take a look at the second story. Again, please read it and see what you come up with. Spoilers below.

For Joy

The particulars of this story are different from the first, but there is one section that is virtually identical. It just so happens to center on the same term that Jesus repeated in the first story: Joy.

Did you hear the refrain? "When he finds it, he *joyfully* puts it on his shoulders...*Rejoice* with me, I have found my lost sheep...there will be more *rejoicing* in heaven...*rejoice* with me I have found my lost coin...there is *rejoicing* in the presence of the angels of God.

Why does Jesus hang out with losers? For joy! Because when one of these sinners repents (is found) and is made safe again, it delights Him. And it delights His Father. Finally, it delights everyone who loves Them. Jesus hangs out with sinners for joy.

It's Worse Than You Know

Not only that but take another look at the original complaint. Did you notice what verb they attribute to Jesus there? They say he "welcomes" sinners. That's true enough but kind of passive. Now check out the verbs He applies to the character representing Himself in the stories. He goes after, finds, puts them on His shoulder, and takes them home. He lights a lamp, sweeps the house, searches carefully and finds.

Jesus is saying, "It's worse than you know. I don't just welcome them, I go after them, search carefully, and sweep the house. I do whatever it takes and I find them and bring them home. And I do it all for joy."

Oh, that reminds me, I have heard this paraphrased as, "the angels in heaven rejoice when a sinner repents." But I'm not sure that captures what Jesus is saying. It says there is rejoicing in the *presence* of the angels. In whose presence do the angles spend all their time? Isn't it the Father's? I think Jesus is saying that the angels who "long to look into these things," are observing the joy of the Father. He is the one who delights to show mercy (Micah 7:18). This was all His idea.

This is all great news for us. God loves losers. He loves to show mercy. He delights to restore broken people. He rejoices to forgive. He takes joy in ending estrangement.

Consider what that means for you and your study:

1. Whatever you've done before or since you came to Christ, He is not ashamed to be with you. He doesn't care if anyone thinks ill of Him for associating with you. He wants you to repent and come to Him. He rejoices in your restoration.
2. He's not ashamed to be with the people around you who don't yet know Him. In fact, He'd rather like it. You probably know someone currently outside of that circle of joy whom Jesus would love to restore. Why not arrange an introduction and see where it goes?

Help your group figure out the meaning of the stories. Try to lead them through some self-discovery as I have attempted to do with you here. If they can see it themselves it's more likely to stick with them. That may even help them believe and rest in the fact that Jesus takes joy in their repentance.

What's Our Response?

There are two main applications for the members of your group.

1. Help them believe that Jesus wants to be with them, no matter what they've done and that He takes joy in their repentance.
2. Help them consider who they could introduce to Jesus.

What Are the Questions?

Luke 15:1-10

LAUNCH

When did you guys come to faith in Christ? Before high school, during high school, or since coming to college? Share a couple of stories.

EXPLORE

1. Before we look at the text this week, what are some of the ways that unbelievers are described in the Bible? Terms, descriptions?

Read Luke 15:1-2.

2. What were the Pharisees complaining about?
3. If this story were retold today with you cast as a Pharisee, who might you be muttering about?
4. As Jesus often did He skipped the direct attack and told a story. Why do that? What's the value of a parable?

Read 3-7.

5. The key to understanding a parable is to realize it has one main point. They're not allegories in which everything is a symbol. Could somebody retell the story?
6. If we're going to figure out the point, let's think about the elements. What's up here? Is anything repeated?

Read 8-10.

7. This story is similar to the first. They both share the same main point. What's this one about?
8. What's the common element in both stories?
9. The purpose of the story, both stories, is to answer the question implied by the mutterers, "Why do you hang out with losers?" What's Jesus' answer to that question?
10. Who is doing the rejoicing by the way?

"gospel" means good news. Here's the shockingly good news: God loves losers. He loves to show mercy. He delights to restore broken people. He rejoices to forgive. He takes joy in ending estrangement.

APPLY

11. What does this story teach us about the character of God?
12. Is there something in your life you need to repent of but that you're afraid to, or feel like you have no right to ask for forgiveness *again*?
13. What does this story suggest about how Jesus would feel if you were to repent?
14. Do you believe it?
15. Who do you know that needs to be gone after, searched for, and found?
16. How could you help them meet Jesus?

What Are the Answers?

1. Allow the group to discuss. Lost is the key term in this study.

Read Luke 15:1-2.

2. Jesus was hanging out with a bunch of undesirables.
3. Allow the group to discuss and surface who they tend to think is beyond grace. Maybe someone with a political view, economic status or behavior that they find particularly distasteful.
4. It gets past our defenses because it's seemingly innocuous, but once it's "in" us and we've accepted it's basic truthfulness, we realize the application contradicts our own ways.

Read 15:3-7.

5. Here you just want the group to begin interacting with and dissecting the story. Have them tell it, talk about it, and begin to figure out what Jesus is saying.
6. Don't give away anything here, let them continue to wrestle with it. The repeated terms are joy, rejoice, etc.

Read 15:8-10.

7. Again, facilitate interactions with the second story.

8. "Rejoice with me I have found my lost _____. In the same way there is *rejoicing* over one sinner who repents."

9. For Joy.

10. Jesus, the Father, and those who love Them. See "What do I Need to Know About the Passage?" for thoughts about rejoicing in the presence of the angels.

11. Allow the group to discuss.

12. Allow the group to discuss. You can create safety by being vulnerable yourself.

13. We may fear He'd be annoyed with us, but in fact He would rejoice.

14. Allow the group to discuss.

15. Encourage the members of your group to think about who they know that they could reach out to with the gospel.

16. Be prepared to talk about some strategies or methods that would help them take the next step in sharing their faith.

Memorize

In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Luke 15:10