

The Parable of Redemptive Love

Luke 15:1-10

October 10, 2021

Today we are entering into one of the best known and most beloved chapters in the whole Bible, which is Luke chapter 15. So you can turn there, you're not already there. Luke 15. Luke 15 is a series of three parables, as you probably know, the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. The lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son and together those three parables paint for us a, a precious, precious portrait of God's love for lost sinners and his exuberant joy in rescuing them. I just want to begin by reading the first 10 verses, which is the first two parables, Luke 15:1-10.

"Now the tax gathers and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable: What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together

his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'

"Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, I have found the coin that I had lost.' Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

In this section of Luke's Gospel, once again, we're really not certain about the setting. We can't be too precise about that, about the exact time or the precise location or the specific occasion that generated these parables. But we do have a general idea by looking at the context in general, we know that Jesus has been traveling and ministering in and around Judea and Perea. He has been journeying ever since Luke 9:51. He's been journeying to meet that divinely appointed time at the cross when he will die on the cross for sins. But along the way, before he gets there at the proper time, he's moving in and out of the city of Jerusalem, sometimes coming as near as Bethany and



Jericho and other places. But he's interacting with crowds and leadership, even in Jerusalem.

If we line up the events in Luke's gospel with those in the other synoptic gospels, and also John's gospel, especially in John's gospel, who marks time for us, we can conclude that this is around, the timing of this is around mid December, that's around the time of the feast of the dedication. That's referring to the 165 BC dedication of the new temple. So this is the time in the mid December Feast of Dedication. That's an occasion that's noted in John 10:22, just after the section that we read for scripture reading. So the thematic parallel to this shepherd, sheep parable. And what we read in our scripture reading in John chapter 10:1-18. They're very close, we can see these thoughts are connected. And we can see that Jesus has shepherding, he has his sheep, he has the wolves, the false shepherds in his mind at this time.

As to the occasion as what we can tell here, what, what seems to have prompted Jesus to deliver these three parables, we can find an immediate answer to that question in verse two. It says there, it was "the grumbling of the Pharisees and the scribes." They're leveling their, their usual criticism at him, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." They made that same charge back in Galilee during his

ministry there, couple years before that, after Jesus called, 'member he called Levi to discipleship in Luke chapter 5, in gratitude, Levi, who's also known as Matthew.

He, threw Jesus a great feast and as he threw him a great feast, he invited his friends and who were his friends, but the sinners, all the outcasts, this large company of other tax collectors, and the text politely says, "and others," the others are the sinners that are talked of here. So the, the Pharisees and their scribes, it says in Luke 5:30, "They," there again, same word "Grumbled against Jesus." Grumbled to Jesus disciples, and he's, they said to the disciples, and Jesus, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Same thing here. They're right back at it with the same old charge, same old line.

As it was in Galilee, so it was all the way through Jesus ministry, verse one, "That all the tax collectors and the sinners were drawing near to Jesus." Now, why were they doing that? What would draw them to Jesus? Look back at verse 25, Luke 14. Remember, Jesus has just confronted an, an enthusiastic, but ignorant crowds of people, these 1000s who are following after him, and they're without any understanding. They don't know the real meaning of what it means to follow him. They don't know the true demands of discipleship. So he

stops, he wheels around and faces them, and he confronts them, laying down the basic demands of discipleship. And we know as he tended to do, Jesus thinned out the ranks, he kinda culled the crowd, the enthusiastic zealots left.

What he was describing in discipleship isn't something that they were interested in. But as he thins the crowd, in so doing, there's a fascinating reality that begins to emerge. The gooden, the good news about that reality comes actually from Jesus' opponents, his perennial enemies, the Pharisees and the scribes when they say, "This man receives sinners, and eats with them." They saw that as an evidence of his disqualification, they said it out loud among the crowd in order to discredit him before others. But it is hard for us to think of a simpler way, or a sweeter way to give the essence of the gospel. But in a sentence just like that, this man receives sinners, this man welcomes sinners, and eats with them. That's the gospel.

That's why you're here, aren't you? That's why I'm here. We found in Jesus, the true grace of God that this is a man who receives sinners, sinners like you, sinners like me. Jesus has reconciled us to God through his own death on the cross. And when he receives us, when he welcomes us, he doesn't leave us at the doorstep. He doesn't even leave us in the front room. He brings us all the way in, seats us at

the dining table, like his brothers and sisters that we are, he gives us the privilege to enjoy table fellowship with him at his own father's table, in the Father's Kingdom. He brings us all the way in. That's what Jesus came to do. "To seek and save the lost." He came to redeem unworthy sinners, to give his life as a ransom for many.

He became the means through his own penal substitutionary atonement, through his shed blood on the cross. He became the means by which God justifies the ungodly, by which he declares us righteous. Imputing our sin to Jesus and punishing him for our sin, and imputing his righteousness to us, treating us as if we were just as righteous as Jesus Christ. What a joy. That's why we're here. That's why we come and worship and praise and sing. That's why our hearts are filled with gratitude for what God has done in Christ, but the religious leaders of Jesus' day, they didn't get that at all. And they had nothing but contempt for Jesus because of that gracious reaching out.

J.C. Ryle says this, "The Pharisees found fault with our Lord for welcoming sinners. And our Lord replies, in effect, that the thing which they found fault with was the very thing he came on earth to do. And the thing that he was not ashamed of, he came to do for sinners." What the shepherd did for his lost sheep, what the woman did for her lost money, and what the father did for his prodigal son, sometimes

easy, sad, but it is easy to lose sight of that simple gospel message.

"This man receives sinners and eats with them."

We can sometimes lose sight of the gospel, call it busyness, distraction, the hurry and busy of life, pressure, trials, afflictions, sometimes the complexity of the things that we read, and we're trying to educate ourselves and grow and understand, but sometimes in all of that knowledge and understanding we, we lose sight of the simplicity that "This man receives sinners and eats with them." What trial matters, if this man receives me, and eats with me? What persecution matters to me? What, whatever the world condemns me for, what does that matter?

Even any particular sin that I commit. How much does that weigh against the fact that "This man receives sinners and eats with them?" We should never lose sight of the gospel. And in and through the gospel, we should never lose sight of the God of the Gospel who is fundamentally good, and his heart is kind, and he is compassionate, and he is gentle and tender with us. He loves lost sinners, as we just read and those parables, he rejoices when he rescues them. So this week, and next week, we're going to look at these first two parables together, because they really do make the same point.

They reinforce one another. Why does Jesus receive or welcome sinners? It's because Jesus loves lost sinners, and he rejoices in rescuing them. And why is that? Because God loves lost sinners, and he delights in rescuing them. Jesus loves what God loves. He rejoices in what God delights in. And so I'd call that a tautology. I'd call that impeccable logic, it's bound together. So as we move through this beautiful chapter, those are some interpretive keys for us. And we're going to see that as we go into the parable of the prodigal son, which is really more like a story that Jesus tells, really unpacks the detail of it.

But we see those interpretive keys coming out of these first two parables, the love of God, and then the delight of God, the love of God, and the delight of God, those two key attributes of God, they're demonstrated in rescuing lost sinners. So God's love, God's delight, Christ's love and Christ's joy. Those two keys, they don't only provide an answer to Jesus' critics here, which they do, but they provide us with very compelling reasons to repent of our sins, to trust in the fundamental goodness of God and to come to Jesus Christ, not to walk, but to run to him and cling to him and embrace him in faith.

So my hope and prayer for you if you're here, and you're not yet a Christian, my hope and prayer for you is that you repent of your sin and enter into the joy of God. That's what we long to see for you, because we've been there, we've been where you are and we know the darkness, and the hopelessness, and the sense of dread and the foreboding of coming judgment. We want to see you not lost, but found. If you're here, and you're a Christian, my prayer for you is that you through this, you're greatly encouraged and comforted. You're reminded of the gospel that saves you, your, your rejoice in your God. You share in his joy and the salvation of the lost. And that you really make it your abiding work to participate in his great work of seeking and saving that which is lost because that is, that is his love expressed to the world and that is what brings delight to God, that is what brings joy to Jesus Christ.

So today we'll look at the themes of divine love in these two parables. Next week, we'll look at the themes of divine joy. So divine love today, divine joy next week, and I've got four themes for you just to break this down. As you take notes today. Here's the first of the four themes. Number one, we see the pardoning love of God. Number one, the pardoning love of God, look back at those first two verses. "Now, the tax collectors and sinners we're all drawing near to hear him. The Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners, and eats with them." In leveling their criticisms of Jesus,

the Pharisees and the scribes, you need to understand this, they were not wrong about what was happening here. They were identifying this correctly, they weren't wrong in identifying the people who are drawing near to Jesus, because they were sinners.

In fact, they were the very worst of sinners. Doesn't do us any good to kind of shade that with soft hues and gentler tones. These are bad people coming near to Jesus. It's Luke who tells us, not the Pharisees and scribes, but it's Luke who tells us in his introducing them, that these are tax collectors and sinners. We've already been introduced to tax collectors, they, back in Luke chapter 5 in particular. They are unscrupulous people who were also considered by their fellow Jews as treacherous as well because they were, they were willing to oppress their countrymen while collecting taxes for Rome. That's a double sin. It's James Edwards, who summarizes their character this way, says "The Roman tax system depended on graft and greed and it attracted individuals who are not adverse to such means. An honest tax collector was in principle, a starving tax collector." End quote there.

But to make their living these tax collectors were dishonest, they charged more than what was actually due to Rome. And that was because they were able to buy the tax franchise or buy a part in it

and then they could charge what they wanted to. Rome didn't care, because if they were killed, because they charged too much, just get another one. Plenty of people who will turn against their fellow Jews, their fellow countrymen. So they charge more than what was actually do. They skimmed off the top to make money for themselves. And so they were hated on two accounts. They, they were hated for collaborating with Rome, collecting taxes for the invading pagan power, and they were hated for cheating their fellow Jews. So because of that tax collectors lived in the margins of society, they were the ostracized outcasts of society. They lived in the company of other outcasts, those summarized there in verse one by that general term sinners.

Some of these sinners were hired muscle for the tax collectors. They were these big, large, physically imposing thugs, worked out in the gym all the time and pumped steroids and all that and they collected what was due. They were the, they were the heavies. They were the strong arm guys, and they protected the tax collectors from retribution. Some of the sinners were like that. Some of the sinners provided illicit entertainments for the tax collectors and all their buddies and friends, gamblers, drinkers, prostitutes, the like, immoral people, all of them living on the edges of the law or outside of the law, far away from polite society, far away from any religious company. They would have been politically not conservative,

politically very liberal, politically they wanted whatever would allow them to live an unhindered happy, in their estimation, life.

So let's just say that they were the kinds of people that were not invited to the banquets and the feasts of the Pharisees. Let's just say that they were excluded. I mean, the, the Pharisees would not even eat with an, *Am Haaretz*. That's the the *hoi polloi*, the, the ignorant masses of the land. For fear of contracting any residual uncleanness from them. I mean, these are the moral people of the land, but just uninstructed, untaught, not well educated, lest in their ignorance, they picked up some ceremonial uncleanness. And then it rubbed off on the Pharisees, so they stayed away from them. But these sinners, they weren't like that, they weren't ignorant in their sin. They were decidedly immoral, perpetually unclean, utterly deplorable.

I was reading Spurgeon earlier, and he was talking about these kinds of people. And he said, "Even Jesus didn't delight in their company, on the basis of who they were and what they were committing, it didn't thrill his soul." You sometimes hear people say, well, Jesus hung out with tax collectors and prostitutes. No, he didn't hang out with them. He was there to bring the gospel to them and he set aside, because he was accommodating them, because he loved them, he set aside what offended his holiness in order that he might bring the gospel to

them, but he didn't indulge in any of that, he didn't overlook it and it's certainly not overlooked here.

You can see in the first two verses Luke has cast these two separate groups. In contrast with one another, you see the tax collectors and sinners of verse 1 contrasted with the Pharisees and the scribes in verse 2. So there's an interesting contrast, it just helps you paint the picture even more. If you look at their character and their way of life, the immoral sinners, that general term could not be in starker contrast to the morally fastidious Pharisees. Total contrast, night and day, light and dark, Pharisees dotted every religious I, crossed every religious T, the sinners couldn't care less about I's or T's or any other letter in the alphabet, if it didn't lead to some kind of pleasure or some kind of profit. If you look at their sense of propriety and dignity and reputation, you couldn't get more of a contrast between the tax collectors and then the scribes.

Tax collectors were unscrupulous and deplorable in society, known that way, even walking down the street, people would cross the street not to be near them. The scribes on the other hand, were highly regarded, very well respected in society 'cause they're well educated, they're diligent students of the law. They're, they're the religious and legal experts. They're the lawyers who regularly dealt with

complex matters. By contrast, tax collectors, they'd given up on all honor. They just abandon any hope of having any good reputation. They traded in a good reputation for the lure of easy money and prosperity.

Another way to take the measure of these sinners drawing near to Jesus is just to think about how Jesus describes them in the three parables. We got the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. One commentator puts it this way, "The lost sheep represents the stupid, foolish sinner. The lost piece of money, the sin, sinner completely ignorant about himself and the younger son, the willful sinner. It's a good way of looking at it. Folly, ignorance, willful transgression, all of that is the fruit of the sin nature. All of that is the rotten fruit of an unbelieving, unregenerate heart that produces on the outside this immoral, dissolute life. Paul put it this way, in Ephesians 4:18, that these are the kinds of people, they share this in common with Gentiles. "They're darkened in their understanding, they're alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance due to the hardness of their hearts. They're callous, they're given over to every kind of sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity."

That's these people coming near to Jesus. The Pharisees and the scribes they're, they're not wrong in identifying the sinners as sinners, they're seeing the picture correctly. Whatever they could see

on the outside, I mean, God could see even more reason for just condemnation, deep within these people on the inside, in their sin nature and flowing through their, their veins, in their hearts, in their minds, in their planning. Things that only God can see. Paul describes them in Romans 3, those whose throats are open graves, their tongues are used to deceive. Snake venom is under their lips. Mouths are full of curses and bitterness. They're swift to shed blood. They live in ruin and misery. They're very far from the way of peace. They're treacherous, dangerous, and why is that? Because there is fundamentally no fear of God before their eyes. That's these people, again scribes and Pharisees.

They're not wrong about these sinners. They're not wrong in seeing them for what they are, and whatever they could see, you know who could see it even deeper is Jesus. In his perfect holiness, he could see what they were, he could see what marked them. He could see what's on the inside, because he knew all man. He didn't need anybody to tell him about what's in a man, John 2. He knows what's in a man. What the Pharisees and scribes failed to see though, what's really happening here. They fail to understand in what's happening, in them drawing near to Jesus Christ, they fail to see what's really going on. They failed to interpret it theologically, doctrinally they failed to take notice of the significance of spiritual change that's happening right in front of their eyes.

Look again, at verses 1 and 2, and let's not miss what they were missing. Let's not make that mistake. There's three evidences here in verses 1 and 2 of God's pardoning love, at work happening in real time right in front of them in verses 1 and 2. First, in verse 1, Luke tells us the tax collectors and sinners, we're all drawing near to hear him. Luke's grammar here is describing what really become the typical scene. Wherever Jesus went the undesirables, the social outcasts, they drew near to Jesus. While the religious elites, all respected in society, all voting red, all right wing people, people who make good neighbors, all those people stood aloof, critical and condemning.

Luke's grammar describes what's really going on, listen to a more wooden translation of the original, gives a little bit of a clearer sense. It says this, "Now, to him," it's emphasized in the original, "to him they were drawing near, all the tax collectors and the sinners." And then there's an infinitive of purpose, "in order to hear him." Here on either end of the sentence "to him, and in order to hear him." Luke has already told us the significance of that. He's told, he's actually prepared us for that statement. We see it more easily when we ignore the chapter and verse divisions and look back at the previous verse, Luke 14:35, the final sentence in that verse, what does Jesus say? "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." And what are

the tax collectors and sinners drawing near to do? Their drawing near to hear him. Maybe subtle, but it's very clear in the text.

Luke is describing here, a scene of newly regenerated tax collectors and sinners. Why do they have ears to hear, eyes to see, hearts to understand? Because God sent his Spirit, caused them to be born again, that they might be regenerated to new life, have a new nature, and therefore have ears to hear. And now that they hear, what did Jesus say in John 10? "My sheep hear my voice and they follow me." These are newly regenerated people, and they're doing what regenerate people do. They're drawing near to Jesus, and they're coming near, in order to hear him, in order to hear and receive his teaching, in order that they might grow in grace and knowledge and the truth.

Whatever it was, that had characterized them in the past, whatever that sin nature drove them to, whatever channels of sin, that sin had cut deeply in their lives, whatever shaped their sinful lives had taken on the outside, that identity is dead and gone, in light of the regenerating grace of God. In light of the words of pardon spoken by Jesus Christ, that is gone, that is an old reality put to death, with Christ on the cross. The first evidence of God's pardoning love is in the grace of regeneration. We see played out here before us,

they gave them ears to hear the truth and a heart to draw near to Jesus and listen.

Second evidence, again, taking careful note of the context. When the tax collectors and sinners are drawing near. What exactly did they hear Jesus say, what were they listening to? Again, back up to the previous context, that previous section. Luke 14:26, 27, 33 they heard in those verses, Jesus laying down the terms of discipleship. In terms of loyalties, by comparison, one must hate his own family relations, even his own life to be Jesus' disciple. Well, these tax collectors and sinners as they're counting the cost on that, all their relationships had been ruined already by their sin. I mean, what deplorable sinner do you know that has all his family relationships intact?

They long ago, long ago stopped looking in the mirror. They couldn't stand the sight of that hollow face and those empty eyes staring back at them. They were done with self, their loyalties. They thought, check. I'll come forward. I'll follow him in discipleship in terms of priority. Jesus said, in order to be my disciple, one must embrace the rejection that comes with being a disciple of Jesus Christ. So they had already been familiar, very familiar with the feeling of rejection being society's outcasts, pariahs, rejects, they

were rejected for all the right reasons that they should be rejected. Now to be rejected, because of him, for the sake of holiness, for the sake of a righteous life, hated by the religious leadership, check, number two, they're in.

They're counting the costs through this thing and then realizing, I've got nothing to hold on to. In terms of prosperity in verse 33. Listen, they'd lived out all the allurements of easy money and guilty pleasures and cheap thrills. And that lifestyle had left them hollow and cold and dead and numb and empty. They're counting the costs, they're like, renounce everything and follow him? Check, number three, I am in. These tax collectors and sinners. They had no qualms about confessing themselves as sinners. They could see it, everybody could see it. They had no qualms, no hesitancy about acknowledging themselves as sinners, seeing their own sinfulness.

What about you, beloved? Have you become so polite, so well put together, that you can't admit yourself to be a sinner? That you can't take a good hard look at yourself and say, and that is sinful, that is wrong, can you not bring yourself to confess your sins to one another? We can never, we must have the sensitivity that these tax collectors and sinners had. We must cultivate that, otherwise, you know, what we turn into? The Pharisees and scribes, don't we?

This is what put the tax collectors and the sinners in much closer proximity to the kingdom of God, than all those who were outwardly moral because sin had already ravaged them. They were ready, here at this point to renounce all. They're ready to embrace the gift that Christ offered to be pardoned for all their sins. That they might be numbered among Jesus disciples, this is good news. And they're looking around, looking at each other. Seeing none of the scribes and the Pharisees going forward. And they're like, I don't know, I must be stupid. They've always told me I'm stupid. But that sounds like good news to me. I'm going forward.

They're ready to renounce everything. They're ready to embrace this gift that Christ offers them, the privilege of being numbered as one of his disciples; to be pardoned of all their sin, to be free from the burden of their guilt, to be cleansed, washed white as snow, to have their consciences cleared from all the evil works. All the bad memories, be numbered among Jesus disciples, a holy band, God's pardoning love and regeneration, he'd given them a new nature. One that found Christ radical call to discipleship not repelling, not a reason to turn and flee. But it was compelling. It drew them near, they longed for that. Their ears are open to the gracious call of Jesus Christ. So they turned toward him, not away from him. They drew near to him, they didn't stand aloof.

And in coming to him we can see a third evidence of God's pardoning love, in verse 2, in the complaint of the Pharisees and the scribes. Jesus received them and he's willing to fellowship with him, he's willing to share a table with them. Once again, consider the context in the previous chapter, Luke 14:21, if you look back, there. The tax collectors and sinners. They're in spiritual terms, they are the poor and the crippled and the blind and the lame. Though they're, they're social rejects, outcasts, in most cases, deservedly so, but Jesus nonetheless invites them to his banquet.

They repented of their sins, they received his pardon, they responded to this invitation. And here they are around the table with him. Language of Luke 13:30. These tax collectors and sinners are among the very last expectedly of every expectation. They're the last, but they became by God's grace in the economy of salvation. They became among the first to find faith in him. "The first shall be last, the last shall be first," man they're in. No matter who they are, no matter what they have done.

Jesus tells us in verse 7, and in verse 10, these people repented. Because there's joy in heaven, verse 7, over these repentant sinners, there's joy before the angels of God, verse 10, over each and

every one of these repentant sinners as individuals. So Jesus is pleased to receive them. As they've come to him in repentant faith. He is pleased to, to grant them the gracious pardon from his father in heaven, of forgiven sin of full, free, unfettered access of reconciliation with God. So the pardoning love of God is evident in spiritual regeneration, responding and repentant faith to this radical call of discipleship.

There's a, next, a second theme that actually gets us into the parables. Okay, number two, the particular love of God. Number two, the particular love of God. Having received these repentant sinners, Jesus is now pleased to receive them all the way. He embraces them, he tucks them safely into his fold, his flock, he protects them against these hostile criticisms of these grumbling, self-righteous Pharisees and scribes. So, we see him here in defense of these newly pardoned sinners, his true sheep. We can see as an apologetic for his Messianic mission, that is a defense of it.

And as an appeal to any lost sheep among the Pharisees and the scribes, he's even appealing to them to draw out from their number many of his true sheep. Luke tells us in verse three, "He told them this parable." It's very clear in the Greek he's specifically speaking to them, to the grumblers. In fact, from Chapter 15, from this point

of Luke's gospel all the way through chapter 18, verse 34, Luke actually switches back and forth showing us how Jesus addresses on the one hand the Pharisees and then on the other hand, his disciples.

Goes from section to section Pharisees, disciples, Pharisees, disciples, he's talking to his, first the foes here in chapter 15. And then his friends, as the narrative moves on, the contrast is stark, it's obvious, it's intentional. We can understand that because as he draws nearer and nearer to the cross, the world divides before him, divides into enemies and friends, sheep and goats, opponents and disciples, there is no middle ground with Jesus Christ.

So three parables here that follow the lost sheep, lost coin, lost son. Jesus is speaking these parables directly to the grumblers. He's speaking directly to the critics. This man, they said, this man, he welcome sinners, even eats with them. A.T. Robertson sees there's, he says quote, "There's a contemptuous sneer in the use of the pronoun 'this man.'" They spoke out openly and probably pointed at Jesus, this man. They're grumbling, but not quietly. They're murmuring, but loudly.

They spoke openly among the crowd and fully intending to turn all these people away from Jesus. And that's why Jesus denounced them so

strongly in Matthew chapter 23. Pronouncing those seven woes on the scribes and the Pharisees, Matthew 23:13 says, "Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in."

They're barring the door to salvation, like barking dogs trying to intimidate the crowds, it's shocking, it's unconscionable. Shouldn't these Pharisees and scribes, those who are appointed as Israel shepherds. Shouldn't they shepherd the sheep toward the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, not away from him? Why are they acting this way? That's because they're false prophets. It's because they're false shepherds, they're disqualified and they're rejected by God.

In fact, turned back in your Bibles to Ezekiel. We looked at this during the conference, but a, don't hesitate to look at it again. Ezekiel 34, Ezekiel 34. In regard to shepherding, this whole chapter is on Israel's false shepherds and then God restoring true shepherding from his own heart, in and through his son that we see in verses 23 to 24. But we'll enter the text here in verse 11, after God has leveled his condemnation against the false shepherds of Israel, we see the heart of God for his flock, and his flock is left because of these

false shepherds, left weak, sick, injured, scattered by these false shepherds of Israel.

They're even slaughtered, is one of the ter, it's a graphic term, slaughtered. All of 'em, these men like these socially respectable, self righteous Pharisees, and scribes. Those who would be standing next to us, voting the same way in all of our elections. I mean, these are our people, these scribes and Pharisees. That's why we've got to listen carefully.

Look at Ezekiel 34:11 and 12, "Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he's among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all the places where they've been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness." Looking down in verse 16, "I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, I'll bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them injustice."

You look down in verses 23 and 24. God appoints to execute the shepherding task, to fully conduct this heart of a shepherd that he

has, he entrust that task to one shepherd, my servant, David. The Good Shepherd of John 10:16, set over one flock as its one and only Shepherd. With that in mind, go back now to Luke 15. Because it seems clear that Jesus has this text, this imagery in mind as he delivers this parable. Jesus hears the grumbling against him. As he, as he sees the tacit accusations against his sheep. As he sizes up the effect of their words and their grumbling upon his sheep.

It's in his role as Israel's Shepherd, their true shepherd in the face of these false shepherds. This is the metaphor he chooses for the first parable. Look again, a verse 4, "What man of you having one hundred sheep, if he's lost one of them does not leave the ninety-nine the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it." What man of you indeed. Every man who understood shepherding in that time would hear that and say, course, that's what you do.

You have one hundred, flock of one hundred, ninety-nine, your count is off, you count again, find one missing, and you get that flock taken care of, and go after the one. Everybody knows that. Shepherding is one of the professions along with agriculture that really formed the backbone of the economy in first century Israel and throughout many of the landmasses, the continents around the world.



That's why it's such an apt metaphor for leadership. Because everybody knew what shepherding was, and sheep are and shepherds are.

The Shepherd was vital because he took care of sheep and the sheep were vital back then because they didn't eat much and eat them out of house and home so to speak. And they were very useful providing wool for clothing, mutton for M.L.T.'s. What is that? That's mutton, lettuce and tomato sandwiches. I'm told they're very good. In Israel, in specific, sheep provided animals for sacrifice, their sacrificial system, and made shepherding for them a vital necessity because it's really no secret. Sheep can't survive on their own, they won't survive. Jesus pictures here, not a hireling, but an owner, a sheep owner, the man who has verse 4.

Has as his abiding possession, present tense, a flock of 100 sheep, tending to this flock would take him away from home, uh, during some months of the year. According to one standard authority, um says quote, "The dryness of the ground made it na, necessary for the flocks of sheep and cattle to move about during the rainless summer, and to stay for months at a time in isolated areas far from the dwelling of the owner. Hence, the herding of sheep was an independent and responsible job.

Indeed, in view of the threat of wild beasts, and robbers, it could even be dangerous sometimes the owner himself or his sons, think about David, did the job. But usually, it was done by hired shepherds." Had to have shepherds. Why, because sheep cannot survive without the care of a shepherd. They can't find pasture on their own. So without food and water, they'll die. They're prone to eating and drinking things that are harmful, things that will kill 'em, they'll die.

They follow instinctively and thoughtlessly, and at times to their own detriment. They'll follow some leader, even following another sheep over a cliff or into a ravine, down a rocky crevasse. They get spooked easily and run away, distracted and wander away, oh shiny and they go after it. When they do they get lost, they fall into a ditch, they, if they don't die there they are separated from the flock and they are totally defenseless. If they are left alone, they become fast food, uh, an easy meal for predators, just like a snack.

So this shepherd, he's doing his count, he discovers one of his sheep is missing. So he doesn't hesitate. He takes immediate action, he leaves the ninety-nine in the open country to go after that one lost sheep, that may sound impulsive to you. It may sound irrational to our untrained ears. But we need to realize shepherds cared for all

of their sheep not just a, a large percentage of their sheep. They cared for all of them, a one getting away matters to them.

Even so leaving the nine' nine in the open country isn't so hazardous as it sounds. We can easily imagine them, these sheep cared for in a familiar pasture to them, uh, perhaps even settled within the makeshift walls of a makeshift sheep fold. Maybe watched by the shepherd's sons or hired men, sheep dogs around so they're safe. They're tucked away. The focus here, what Jesus wants to emphasize and wants to convey is clearly not about the shepherd's attentiveness to the ninety-nine. What he wants us to see is the shepherds concern, a grave concern for the one.

He wants us to see the shepherds, pity and compassion and concern and love. For the one, his all consuming attention on the particular. Percentage of potential loss doesn't matter to the shepherd. Losing one out of a hundred is unacceptable to him. Ninety-nine percent is not okay. This one percent at this moment is all he cares about because the individual sheep is precious to him. You out there who have large families. Which kid do you want to do without with? Right? If you lose one, you don't say Well, the Lord has blessed us with fourteen others, so we're good. Oh we'll get another one.

No, it's the same there. He's willing to leave the majority behind in order to go find that one solitary lost sheep because that lost sheep has his heart. Goes through great effort to get to that one sheep, going after it, present tense, continuous effort on his part, he retraces his steps. He takes whatever risks are necessary, endures whatever conveniences are required, pain, cold, hunger in order to find that one particular solitary, lost sheep. Why? Because he can see in his mind's eye, he knows which sheep it is.

He's got a mental picture of all the sheep, he knows them, calls them by name. And he can picture this one bleating. B L E A T I N G and could be B L E E D I N G. I just realized when I pronounced that, it sounds the same either way. But the sheep is alone, terrified, it will certainly die unless he finds it soon. Sinner if you are here and you're among the redeemed. You know this particular love that God has for you, that the Good Shepherd has for you.

But if you're yet to be redeemed my friend, you need to know that God does not play percentages. His love is a particular love. He didn't send his son to die on the cross for the potential of a massive humanity who might come. He put his si, his Son on the cross to die for his people, to save his people from their sins. It's a particular people. He knows them by name. His love is particular, its individual,



it's specific. Christ's atonement is particular, individual, specific, as Paul says, Galatians 2:20, "The son of God loved me, and gave himself up for me."

Before the foundation of the world, God chose you, beloved, and he chose you by name, a mental picture of you, he chose you. He decreed your salvation, decreed you for salvation, by name, divine care and compassion is all directed toward you, to care for you in your particular situation, facing your particular dangers, with your disposition, and your quirks and your liabilities and your challenges.

All of you subject to your particular fears and anxieties. He knows them all and he doesn't leave you there. Doesn't leave you in a ditch. He doesn't leave you in a briar patch. He doesn't leave your wool matted, infested with bugs. He doesn't leave you as prey for the beasts, lions and the bears and the dogs and the wolves. God sent his one and only son, to die for sinners and to die for you by name. Son of God knows you by name and as Jesus Christ hung on that cross, receiving from the father, the full penalty due for your specific sins. You were in mind, in the mind of the eternal Son of God, he knows you by name.

He loves you by name, John 10:14. "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me." And was it a point in time that he came and sought you, sending his spirit to cause you to be awakened to truth, just as a shepherd seeks his lost sheep, so percentages don't matter to him. He leaves behind the ninety-nine in a heartbeat to go after that one. Particular love of God is a set, eternally fixed love. It's a love that's under the inescapable eye of divine omniscience. It's a love, that's backed by the power of divine omnipotence. It's a love that's bound by the sphere of divine omnipresence, meaning there is no binding, God will rescue, he will find every one of his lost sheep.

So we're gonna see the particular love of God show up in the next parable as well. But let's consider a third theme as we get into that second parable, a third theme, number three, the persistent love of God, the persistent love of God. When God sets out to, to find that which is lost, there is no stopping until that lost one is found, it's illustrated in both parables. "The shepherd," verse 4 "leaves the ninety-nine behind to go after the one that is lost." And what does it say at the end of the verse there? "Until he finds it." Right? Emphasis in the first parable was on the one versus the many. Emphasis in the second parable, verse 8 is on the persistent effort that goes on in the search.

So look at verse 8, "Or what woman" first it's a man, now it's a woman oh, "What woman having ten silver coins. If she loses one coin does not light a lamp and sweep the house and diligently seek again until she finds it." So Jesus has swapped characters here from a man to a woman, he switches scenes from the pasture lands of shepherding to the domestic life of the home, he changes the lost item from an animate object, a sheep, which evokes the shepherd's sympathy and pity, to an inanimate object, a small silver coin which is valuable to the woman.

Perhaps your home is similar to mine where it's rather normal. It's a far too familiar experience to lose things. Uh, keys, phones, passwords, shoes, important papers, on the day you need them, to feel that tinge of panic and the pressure that comes from needing to find, that frantic feeling of the search, followed by prayer, usually, right? Followed by a more careful and slower search. And then the joy of finding that lost item, the relief, followed by giving of thanks.

Having studied to prepare for this sermon, I now praise God for those routine experiences in my life, though I don't always recognize them in the moment, of losing and finding because that repeated pattern in my home all along. For many, many years, he's been preparing my heart to grasp this text, and I rejoice. Here's a woman

who reacts to what would have been a rather common scenario in a home. The home is pictured here is a typical dwelling of someone who's living in a small rural village, mud brick walls, no windows, hard packed dirt floors, very much like the frontier homes of 150-200 years ago in this part of the country.

During most of the day life is lived out doors. Doors left open, that meant dirt and debris accumulated on the floors. So sweeping is a routine part of life, it's mostly performed in the evening. After the day's work is done, drawing water, that's all, all the stuff that goes on during the day, drawing water for the pods, gathering fuel for the fire, cooking, cleaning, washing all along the way trying to care for those children, teaching, training, correcting, comforting them, after the day's work is done in the evening. Then, sun's going down, sun's setting and the woman is performing the nighttime routines.

Part of the routine is to check her savings account, and when she does she discovers one of her 10 drachmas is missing, having only 10 drachmas here, she is not at all wealthy. Drachma's a Greek coin made of silver like the denarius, the Roman equivalent, it's a day's wage for a common laborer, and she has 10 of these coins. Some commentators suggest you might keep them on a string, string of coins, maybe wearing it like a necklace or, or maybe weaving it into her hair, to

keep them for safekeeping. Some women wore strings like that of coins like ornaments, but this is not a significant amount of money.

This woman is of humble means. She's not concerned about wearing ornaments during her daily work routine, but she is concerned about losing 1/10 of such a limited savings. Be a terrible loss for anybody. A small coin like this dirty, tarnish silver, wouldn't be easy to find in the dim light of the home. So as she discovers the loss, she gets right to work. She lights a lamp, middle the house, she moves articles of furniture outside, hurriedly starts sweeping out the house. She's choking on the dust, but it doesn't matter.

She is intent on finding that coin. Searching diligently, looking at every crack on the floor, every corner of the room until at last she finds her coin. Why's she so persistent? Because that little coin, though it's small, though it's dirty, though it's insignificant to many of much wealthier means than her, for this woman size does not matter. Relative value in the eyes of others doesn't matter. This coin, this particular coin is her coin, and it's precious to her. So for her this coin is of immense value, relative to her whole savings account.

Small coin matters. It's so valuable, she puts forth whatever effort is required, forever, whatever time is required to find that lost coin. And when she finds it, she tucks it back into the folds of her apron or she fastens it back on the string with the other nine coins, like that inanimate object, the dirty, tarnished silver coin, lost down on the dust of the floor, a dirty floor. It's a picture of sinners, isn't it? Covered beneath the mire and the filth of a fallen world. Ignorance as a coin with no thought. Ignorant of their true condition, oblivious about the wretchedness and the hopelessness of their situation. Apart from any move of divine grace, that's where they sit until Judgment Day.

That is Spurgeon put it, "The silver piece was lost, but not forgotten." So too the lost sinner, though ignorant, and oblivious as a dead inanimate object like a dirty coin. God has not forgotten his own. At the right time, the Son of Man comes to seek and save that which is lost. So this woman's effort pictures the persistent love of God, diligent to search out and find what's precious to him, what is valuable to him, he's not going to stop searching until he finds what he considers valuable and precious to him.

I'm reminded of David's words, you can just write it down in Psalm 139. "Oh, Lord, you've searched me and known me. You know, when

I sit down and when I rise up, you discerned my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways." Notice how David is picturing the omniscience of God. He knows all things and yet God searches, "Even before a word is on my tongue. Behold, oh, Lord, you know it all together. You hem me in, behind and before, you lay your hand upon me." Like a dirty lost coin. David goes on in that beautiful, Psalm 139 to describe the implications of God's omniscience, his omnipresence that in reality, David's place David's ways, David's thoughts, David's situation, David's circumstances, nothing in his life is unknown to God.

Nothing is hidden from his persistent searching, all knowing, always searching gaze, and it's a gaze of love for David. It's a gaze of love for those coins like you and me that he owns, that he strings together around his neck. God, each one of his people is far more valuable than a small silver coin, to him each one is, of them is like a jewel, absolutely, and uniquely precious to him. The imagery is justified based on Zechariah 9:16 and 17. "On that day the Lord their God will save them, as the flock of his people; for like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land. For how great is his goodness, and how great his beauty!"

Brings both of those images together, doesn't it? Shepherd sheepling, seeking sheep, woman seeking lost coin, but now a jewel. When we come under the pardoning love of God. When we're received, we are received by Jesus, the friend of sinners, listen, we have the individualized, particular care and concern of God, never forgetting us, always seeing us. His love is particular, his care is persistent, even when you may feel not paid attention to, even when it feels like God is not listening to your prayers, he is. He knows your thoughts before you think them your words before you speak them.

Brings us to, here a fourth theme, number four, the protective love of God, protective love of God. Number four, go back to the shepherd searching for his lost sheep and we'll take it up in verse 5 after he finds his sheep. It says there "When he is found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing." He lays the sheep on his shoulders, rejoicing. Alfred Plummer points out here how tender the shepherd is with this recovered sheep. He says, "The owner does not drive it back. He doesn't drive it on the ground and drive it before him, drive it back. He doesn't lead it back. Nor have it carried. He carries it himself." And he adds this, "There is no upbraiding of the wandering sheep, no murmuring at the trouble." End quote.

That is, he's not scolding the sheep. You dumb sheep. You know how much trouble you cost me? I had to go, I almost broke my ankle crossing that ditch right there. It wandered away again, how many times have I told, none of that, right? What a contrast, I'm, I'm only quoting that because that's how I tend to think. We tend to be like that, don't we? I mean, what parent among us has not had that panicked feeling in a crowded area, teeming with thousands of people, some country fair or some place like that? And you realize ah, the panic sets in as you realize one of your kids is missing. When you finally find that kid, after all the hugs and kisses and all that kind of stuff, right? You get back in the car, where no one can hear ya. And there's a mild scolding that follows about safety and responsibility and all that other stuff, right? None of that here.

The gentle Shepherd knows sheep are stupid by nature. They tend to get distracted by something shiny and wander off to their own peril. And so in finding the sheep, there's no sense in scolding the dumb animal, doesn't enter the shepherd's mind. He's just joyful. He's thankful that he's found his beloved sheep. That's the picture we see in Isaiah, Isaiah 40, verse 11, "He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young." That's what happens here.

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The shepherd comes, sees the sheep, pulls the stickers and stuff out of its wool, scoops up this helpless sheep by this point exhausted from its panic, completely out of energy, trembling and shivering from fear and worry. And he cradles that animal, putting its belly against the back of his neck, pulling the legs, all four legs down, holding the two hind legs and the two front legs together, pulling them tightly to his chest. Starts the journey back home and notice end of verse 5, what is he doing? What's his attitude? Not murmuring, not grumbling, not like the Pharisees and the scribes, not like false shepherds, he's rejoicing, rejoicing.

Listen, whatever you come in this church with, if you are a repentant sinner, I don't care what your baggage is. We love you. We love you. We want you here. There's not a one of us who doesn't have sins like that, that need the tender care of a shepherd who rejoices over us being found rather than blaming us for all the stuff we've gotten into. We want you here.

Notice, Jesus portrays the shepherd here, is returning in the parable, not to the sheep fold, not to cast it back in with other ninety-nine, he's going back to his own home in verse 6. It's as if he brings the sheep into the warmth of his own house. Remember the shepherding Psalm, Psalm 23, where David says, that he treats

him like a sheep. And then he says, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, my cup runneth over." Like, wait a minute, we're thinking of a sheep and picturing David as a sheep.

And now he's sitting at a table with little hooves up on the table. Can't, he can't even hold the wineglass, you know, he's gonna drop it. It's the picture though that we're given, where, he's sitting at a table. The sheep comes into the house, he's in the safety, in the friendly company of the shepherd's friends and his neighbors. He's safe in the arms of a shepherd. In his loving hands, that's what it means to belong to Jesus Christ. That's what it means to be one of his disciples.

So these new converts, these repentant tax collectors and sinners, they're experiencing the protective love of their shepherd. At this very moment, while Jesus is correcting the grumblers. They didn't need to face the scorn and contempt of the Pharisees and scribes alone. They didn't need to have an answer. Jesus had one. These redeemed people, pardoned, reconciled to God. They're now wrapped as it were, around the neck of Jesus, such a beautiful picture.

Their bellies against his neck, born upon his shoulders, him bearing all the weight. Such a beautiful picture. And if you think about it, it's a theological picture, isn't it? It portrays Jesus as the one who bears upon his shoulders, his people from start to finish, from salvation to glorification. Charles Spurgeon points this out. He says, "Some of the old writers delight to put it thus, in his incarnation, he came after the lost sheep. In his life, he continued to seek it, in his death he laid it upon his shoulders, in his resurrection he bore it on its way, and in his ascension, he brought it home rejoicing."

Our Lord's career is a course of soul winning, of a life laid out for his people. And in it you may trace the whole process of salvation. It's a good word. Everything from start to finish, from eternity past to eternity future. So born upon Jesus shoulders, wrapped around his neck, worn like jewels in the crown upon God's head, the sheep are under divine protection. That's our point number four. It's a protecting love.

Jesus speaks to these enemies in John 10:26, "You don't believe because you're not among my sheep." You don't belong to my sheep. Then he tells them, his enemies about his protecting love for his sheep, as, as if to say hands off. "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, they

follow me. I give them eternal life. They will never perish." No matter what you say, no matter what you do, no matter how much you persecute. They'll never perish. "No one will snatch them out of my hand. My father, who's given them to me, is greater than all, and no one's able to snatch them out of the father's hand. I and the father are one."

Look, "If God is for us, who can be against us," right Romans 8, for those who are the recipients of God's pardoning love, which is evident in the fruit of regeneration, repentance of sin, coming to Jesus in faith, hearing and understanding his teaching, following him and obedient discipleship. Listen, for those who are recipients of God's pardoning love, there are no limits at all to the infinite and eternal love of God. God pulls out all the stops. He showers us with this pardoning love, this particular love, persistent love, and this protective love. And when we come back next week, we're going to look at these parables again and get the joy of seeing the delight of God in finding what he seeks out to find and rescuing what's lost, let's pray.

God, how do we respond to this? But except to say, thank you. You who did not spare even your own son, but freely gave him up for us all. How will you not along with him freely give us all things? Indeed

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you have. Jesus said, "Dear children, your father has given you the kingdom." There's nothing to worry about. There's nothing to be afraid of. And before you we, we know what this is like. We are like lost sheep.

We are, that is such an apt picture for what we are, often distracted, prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. We're like sometimes that dumb, inanimate coin laying in the dirt. Father, we are so thankful that our salvation is not up to us. It's completely up to you from start to finish, from beginning to end, and you who began a good work in us will complete it until the day of Christ Jesus. We love you. We give thanks to you in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. May we bathe in this message about your love and never wonder in Jesus' name, amen.