

Parable of the Lost Sheep- Rejoicing in Repentance
City Life Church
Luke 15:1-7

Good morning, my name is Austin, and I am the director of Worship here at City Life. If you guys will stand with me, we will continue to sing...I'm kidding. If this is your first time visiting, I'm so happy to have you here, if this whole thing is new for you, thanks for joining us, I'd love to get to know you and listen to you after the service. If this is your thousandth time here, it's so great to see you and gather around the risen Christ with you!

This morning we will be continuing our journey through the parables Jesus told in the new testament. Today specifically we will be looking at the parable of the lost sheep.

If you haven't noticed, in all of the parables we have been looking at, Jesus is constantly subverting the way we see the world. Like a blinding light that can pierce the darkness, he is showing us His Kingdom seeps into every part of our lives through these stories. If this is new for you or something you are wanting to check out, I invite you to ask God help you understand and see him more clearly. If this is a specific parable that you may have heard before and easily brush off as "something you have already learned about," I want to invite you to pray with me, for us to see him more clearly and cling to him more tightly and trust his Word.

Let's pray...

Most Holy God, we thank you for your kindness to us, we see it in your Word. We thank you for the gift of this parable. Lord we confess that we may have already disengaged and plan to avoid any friction or tension we may feel. Lord help us to embrace growth and obedience. Draw us near to you. Holy Spirit, help us hear and respond. Amen

THE SCENE/INTRODUCTION

As we dive in, I want to set up the scene a little bit. This will help us give some context to how this whole thing goes down.

Luke 15:1-2

Now the tax collectors 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."

Imagine something like an old school lunch room scene...

You've got the band crew, the sports folk, theatre, the kids who were likely about to get detention next period, and those who were studying. Similarly, we've got kind of a mix of people going on; we've got the Pharisees, tax collectors, and sinners. Bad kids and good kids.

The tax collectors were the "bad kids."

TAX COLLECTORS

You see the tax collectors were some bad dudes. On the surface you might think, these guys just come and take money, and maybe they take a little bit more than they should. While that is true, these guys were probably worse than you perceive them currently. These guys wouldn't only take your money, they'd take advantage of you, cheat you, and bully the helpless around. Without remorse. Make no mistake, these were not the type of people you would want to identify with. Sitting with these tax collectors were what this text calls, "sinners".

SINNERS

We've all heard the term sinners, but what does it mean? We throw this word around a lot and in this specific text sinners meant the people who were considered morally and ceremonially unclean. They didn't keep God's Law. This could include prostitutes, gamblers, people who made a living immorally, like tax collectors. More bad kids.

PHARISEES

Then, we have the Pharisees, let's make this quick ok?

They're the good kids. They've out-bibled you and me, they prayed more than you and me have by the time they were five, and had memorized almost half the bible by the time they were teenagers. Pharisees knew the bible.

If you were to sum this up in the pharisees eyes- there are the "lost" and "found", the bad and the good. They saw themselves as "the found" of God, the good, and the sinners as "the lost" to God, the bad. We will see that Jesus is going to subvert, even flip, their understanding of lost and found, good and bad.

JESUS

Then, there is Jesus sitting amidst the tax collectors and sinners, *the lost*. This really fires up the Pharisees.

Luke 15:2

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

Within a statement the Pharisees say, “This man receives sinners and eats with them”. This isn’t a question they are asking Jesus, they are straight up condemning him, without a doubt! In fact, they don’t directly refer to Jesus during this moment but a more derogatory approach by saying, “this one”...Why? There were few reasons why a Pharisee would perceive this as sinful...Let’s look at one.

Psalm 1

Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

To the Pharisees, this is what Jesus is doing, or better put...this is what they are accusing Jesus of..However- they are so blinded by their piety they miss that Jesus is doing the opposite of the verse—he’s **sitting** with sinners and scoffers! He is not taking on the character of the sinners and scoffers- he’s actually on a mission to heal and restore the broken and bring them to repentance... that’s the theme that we are looking at today.

He is subverting the way we see the lost and giving us a fresh lens through his Kingdom.

Now we know contextually what’s going on, let’s take some time on how Jesus responds.

JESUS’ RESPONSE

Identifying with Others

Jesus responds to the Pharisees with this parable. As we get into this parable there’s something very important the way Jesus responds to the Pharisees. There’s a lot of rhetoric in here that Jesus uses to make a really great point, I think we often skip over so I want to spend some time on it. I believe it will really help us see what Jesus is getting at and using the previous contextualization we can really see how this parable falls on the listeners (that being the pharisees).

Luke 15:4 (he’s addressing the pharisees at this point)

“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?

Here Jesus is using a rhetorical device in this first statement, “what man of you doesn’t?” to elicit a “of course I would do that response”. It’s as if someone were to

say, “who doesn’t want to go to pint house pizza?” That’s right...nobody...because pint house pizza is always the best decision when it comes to food! But it’s paired with a really odd statement...leaving 99 sheep in the open wilderness- to go find one.

Why is Jesus doing this? Why is he framing this parable as common sense?

And why would it make sense to leave 99 sheep? We would completely disagree with him.

The Factory- Kingdom of Efficiency

Picture yourself running a company or some sort of factory- and you’ve got 100 employees. This factory though is no amazon-robot-run factory. No, this factory requires constant work and attention from you. You are constantly having to herd in your employees or help them understand what they are doing. Then all of a sudden you have one employee that has finally had it and storms out.

What are you going to do?-

You’re going to run to your HR and tell them to hire someone because you need someone. You don’t run outside and beg for them to come back! You don’t have time for that! It’s not efficient to leave the 99 for the 1.

That’s the sort of thinking Jesus is addressing within the pharisees and the way that a lot of us operate-we operate with a kingdom efficiency mindset. This is how the Pharisees are hearing it and that’s what Jesus is addressing with this “common sense” language. He’s showing us the stark difference between his kingdom and our kingdom.

Jesus Turns This Over

Jesus turns the thinking on its head. Kingdom thinking, the economy of God’s Kingdom values the sheep down to the , we’ll get into a lot more of this later. A good shepherd valued every sheep, and so does Jesus. **Jesus challenges our kingdoms of efficiency with his profound love for the one.**

Characters and Identity

So we’ve seen how this parable is already landing on the ears of the Pharisees as Jesus challenges kingdom of efficiency- but he continues to challenge our own kingdoms and the pharisees kingdoms in his choosing of characters. Let’s look at the text.

“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

Often times we enjoy stories that we somehow can relate with or want to relate with. I'm drawn to action movies because I am incredibly strong and brave. I can identify very easily with John Wick, or Jason Bourne. I know it's obvious there is a resemblance...point being, we identify with the people we want or think we are.

But, this stories main character is a shepherd, and guys a pharisee cannot identify nor wants to identify with a shepherd.

Shepherds were not particularly the most noble and upright people. They didn't make much money, spent most of the time outdoors with animals, so they smelled awful. They were known a bit for their dishonesty and lawlessness.

You see within the choosing of characters and the first question, Jesus exposes the distance that a pharisee has created. Ironically enough, their actual distance in the scene. You've got Pharisees shamefully looking at a distance at Jesus, tax collectors, and sinners. Now the pharisees are caught between two undesirables in the story—dumb sheep and dishonorable shepherds.

Application

So what's Jesus getting at with this?

In this first section Jesus is really pinning down *who we identify with and how his kingdom works*. You see, in this parable found will come to mean being saved through God's mighty grace. Lost on the other hand, meaning those who do not know God or have not placed their faith in God.

Remember the “bad” and the “good”?-we have lost and found. There are 99 found sheep and 1 lost sheep the good shepherd is going after.

However, when we look at this scene The Pharisees in no way want to identify with a lowly, smelly shepherd. Nor do they see a need for the “1” lost sheep. This is obvious in the way that they are standing by with shame condemnation. **They have removed themselves from the equation (parable) before he's even began. That's the point. That's what Jesus is calling out.** While the Pharisee might see Jesus is saying they are the 99 they certainly don't see themselves as responsible for “lost” sheep or sense compassionate to seek them or rejoice when returning from safety. They functionally aren't trusting the shepherd who is going after the lost sheep.

They have removed themselves from the entire equation (parable). The Pharisees economy of the 99 is completely and starkly different from that of Jesus'.

Remember that factory you were running? That guy that walked out. Jesus is saying drop what you are doing and go after that person.

Are you living in the kingdom of efficiency and avoidance?

Too busy or occupied to leave the 99?

Do you relate and sympathize with the Pharisee in this case?

INDIA

A few years ago, I was visiting my sister in India. First off, I had never been overseas at the time. I had lived my entire life able to have air conditioning and plenty of space. To put it lightly, as soon as I arrived in India, I was (so I thought) deprived of every need in my life. I think some people call this culture shock, I think I more had culture heart attack...It didn't take me long to disengage from the culture, I was over it the second I hopped in a cab with little to zero leg room. Quiet and pouty I removed myself from the people around me- emotionally, spiritually, and behaviorally.

Around the fourth day, my sister and I jumped in a cab to go grab some food. Silent as I had been the whole trip I stared out the window, but suddenly the cab driver tapped my leg. He turned to me and said, "tell me about Jesus"....WHAT

By God's grace I got to introduce this guy to the good news of Jesus, and pray for him. But in hindsight, I sat back and wondered, "how many conversations like this could I have had if I didn't look after myself-who was the "99"". I was looking out for number one-me the whole time...missing out on God's beautiful work among beautiful people.

Christian, when you walk into your work place, do you remove yourself from this parable? Are you removing yourself from compassion for those who are lost?

Don't make the same mistake the Pharisees have fallen prey to in this story.

The Pharisees created themselves two major excuses for not engaging those who need Jesus- **One**, they've ruled out the **need** to seek out one person when they have a more desired group they are with already. **Two**, they've valued their social identity over sharing God's grace with those who have not experienced it.

But Jesus is saying, "leave that person, group, position behind to come and experience what I am doing..."

Who are you indifferent to? Who do you think, they'd never come to Christ?

Make no mistake- this doesn't just happen in India or new places. In your city group, have you declared and found your "99" more important people based on social status? Do you leave those who you really enjoy chatting with to go greet and care for someone you don't enjoy chatting with?

This is exactly what Jesus is addressing. Don't miss out on seeing God's redemptive work because you are stuck in your selfishness.

THE SHEPHERD

Pursuing, Rejoicing, and Repentance

Among all of this Jesus is painting a picture of a hopeful reality in the character of the good shepherd.

Luke 15:4-7

“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? And 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.

As we stated previously, the sheep are direct images of those who are lost and those who have been found. Simply put, Jesus is the shepherd in this parable. As we look at this parable let's spend time looking at the character of the shepherd and what this parable tells us about God's character and who we are meant to be...

The Pursuit

I mentioned earlier a bit about how upside down this parable can be, this is where that really comes into play. A shepherd commonly would have a flock of 100-200 sheep, and their job was, you guessed it...herd them. Often times at night, the shepherd would count up his sheep, to make sure they were all still there. Take note, sheep are dumb and have the tendency to wander off. In this specific parable he comes up 1 short. Just 1.

Here's the thing about a sheep when it gets lost. By the time it realizes that it is no longer with its other sheep friends, it has wandered very far away. When it does realize it's alone, it goes into deep fear and panic and just sits. Doesn't move at all. Makes a great and easy kill for a wolf.

Church, this is another upside down part of the story. It doesn't make a lot of sense for this shepherd to go and search for a sheep that's more than likely been tattered and torn to shreds by the products of the wilderness. Why would a shepherd leave 99 in the open wilderness for something that is more than likely dead. The beauty isn't only that he leaves the ninety nine. It's that he leaves to find one.. He finds it that valuable.

The pursuit of the shepherd is a picture of profound love and cherishing because that sheep has probably already been attacked and is now dead.

Application- The Pursuit

This is what I love so much about this parable. While this parable can seem so damning to the self righteous, at the same time he's reminding those who have faith in God of their story...

This is us! For those in faith, Jesus is saying...at one time you were lost- not just confused, or unsure- you had no idea that you were lost.

But God in the richness of his mercy- sent Jesus and his immense grace split into and through your life. The good shepherd pursued you regardless of the treacherous wilderness. Though you were stranded in the wilderness, **the Shepherd, Jesus sought after you-** You see this? This is what Jesus did. He left heaven's throne- pleased to dwell among us- he left the glory and lofty place and came down to serve man. He didn't stop there.

The Shepherd picked us up and rejoiced- Jesus obeyed the Father to the point of death- dying on a cross for our sin- and was please to do it the whole time because we are that valued to him!!

When he finds the sheep, he doesn't put the sheep on a leash and angrily jerk it back to the flock. No, he picks it up! Places it on his shoulders. Carries us, warms us, rescues us from sin, death, and hell.

Ephesians 4:1-10

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God...

Carried by the shoulders of grace through Jesus, the Good Shepherd has welcomed you home- That's great news. It wouldn't have happened without his pursuit

QUESTIONS

Have you considered the pursuit of the shepherd for yourself? Have you counted others-utterly and seemingly hopeless? **Maybe you need to stop and consider what God has done for you.** That person in your workplace is no more lost than you were at a time that God shed his grace on you. Look and remember God's mighty work in your life. It's no different today than when it was when he picked you up on his shoulders...

THE WANDERER

Perhaps maybe you have wondered off... Can I just say to you...

The danger of the wolves in the wilderness is real.

Jesus tells us...

[John 10:10 - The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.](#)

Don't wander in the wilderness thinking you are safe- don't fight the good shepherd that is begging you to rest on his shoulders and come home. What things are calling you to wander to the wilderness? Bring that to your fight club, fight it with the Word of God, pray for his help and strength to stay within his care. Apart from the Shepherd is not a safe place to be, Church. He's pursuing you, he's coming after you. Concede to his grace and peace...

Let's continue to look at the character of the Shepherd

The Rejoicing of the Shepherd

Not only does this Shepherd pursue us, he rejoices...

[Luke 15:2 "And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."](#)

The search for the lost sheep proves fruitful. He picks it up and when he comes home, he calls his friends. This goes back to the kingdom efficiency idea we discussed earlier. Easily the shepherd could have been angry that this sheep wandered off. Waste his time. But... No punishment, no "I told you so"-simply rejoicing comes from the shepherd.

As the shepherd bares the weight of a wayward sheep, he himself rejoices. He doesn't groan and complain about the asinine character of the sheep. He is overjoyed to see and find it.

God rejoices over you as he lays you on his shoulders to bring you back to safety.

Application- Rejoicing of the Shepherd

I believe this is a key verse maybe for some people here today. Maybe you look at yourself, and think. "Man, I have sinned so much, and rebelled. I have run away with no remorse and somehow God found me. I am thankful for that, but I still feel like he may not like me very much, sure he loves me but doesn't like me."

Can I invite you to turn away from staring so heavily and the deeds you have done, and look at the Good Shepherd who is placing you on his shoulders with a smile and

REJOICING BECAUSE YOU ARE HIS! There is no room for shame and deprecation when we look at the Shepherd who has pursued us at great lengths and rejoices because we have union with him now. **Jesus has ultimately gone to the greatest degree of aid- laying down his life- becoming the slaughtered sheep- so that we may be restored by him.**

The Rejoicing with People

God doesn't only rejoice because he has found you. No, fortunately it doesn't stop there. The party increases as the response increases.

6-7

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.

You see this? The shepherd invites all his friends over ONE sheep. Just One! He does the same over you, and all of heaven rejoices along! **What a good and great redeemer that rejoices when he finds us and is overjoyed as we move towards repentance.**

Church, God the Good Shepherd rejoices as we repent.

Repentance is good news and elicits extreme joy.

Not just that, but a communal joy!

COMMUNAL

I can't help but sit back and wonder if sometimes we behave like the pharisees in this story and take no part in having joy communally over repentance. There's clearly a separation of the Pharisees and their grumbling about associating with sinners and the approach Jesus has taken.

Are you not engaging your city group when it comes to repentance? Are you not confessing sin? Have you removed yourself from this part of the gospel? Have you been approaching this situation as the pharisee has or as Jesus has?

Stop partaking in dodgy conversations or ambiguous spiritual conversations, that's not what you were made for! You are a child. of. God! Fight for the hard conversations, sit at other people's tables that are different from you, put in the long hours of getting to know someone, bring them into your city group, GO to your city group, stop being passive in your fight club, love your community in the hard times when they don't love you- so that you may rejoice as Jesus draws them into his love and as they repent! You were made to eat with, receive sinners, and rejoice in others repentance. Maybe repentance has not been communal for you because you see as other people fine without your help. Maybe you see them at a distance struggling but don't want to

intrude or get involved. This is opposite of what Jesus has done for us. Jesus in all regards has become the dirty smelly shepherd to pick us up and restores us. Join him and trust the good shepherd. **Repentance is something worth rejoicing over in community!**

BAPTISMS

Last week we gathered together as a church to do this exact thing. One by one we heard people proclaim Jesus as king of their life. The whole church, young and old walked down to the banks in anticipation, as we prepared to see people baptized into a community of faith. Each person being baptized went down into the water- representing their death with Christ- and as they emerged everyone shouted and clapped with joy as they represented new life in Christ! Then, with smiles, and joy in our hearts we shared a meal together. No anger for past rebellion, no division, no “I told you so’s”. A picture of unity in the good Shepherd and party for a beautiful purpose. Church, let’s continue to do this, extreme joy in response to extremely good news. Repentance is good news and a call for great joy.

CONCLUSION

THE CHURCH

So what do we do with all of this? Three things...

1. I believe this parable graciously points out our apathy to evangelism and talking about God with those who are lost.

Martin Luther King Junior said, “apathy is the opposite of love”.

Apathy thrives in the kingdom of efficiency,

But love and pursuit excels in the kingdom of Christ.

Church, have you removed yourself from the parable and not identified with any but those who you can easily associate with? In apathy have you neglected sharing the good news of Jesus our Good Shepherd? Take time to think about your city group, your office space, your school. Who do you distance yourself from out of a lack of compassion and an overflowing of selfishness? Draw near to them the same way Jesus received and ate with the sinners and tax collectors. Don’t disengage like the pharisees had done.

You can easily begin doing this

You have 3 meals a day, 7 days a week, that’s 21 hours or so to engage someone who does not know Jesus.

We all have some sort of recreation that we engage with, bring someone in, ask them about faith in God. Start up a conversation.

Seems like everyone is buying houses these days, invite your neighbor to set up your garage door, cook them a meal and bring them into your home and talk about faith.

2. I believe this parable graciously points out our need to rejoice in repentance communally

Jesus has graciously invited us to rejoice with him as our brothers and sisters repent. **Take those conversations in city group to grow in holiness, together.** Uphold and celebrate holiness in your small groups, your family, and your fight clubs. Rid your conversations of gossip, anger, and disdain. Fill them with God's Word, prayer, and joy in the glory of God! These are the things God and all of heaven rejoices about.

3. Lastly, I believe this parable graciously points us to the reality that we have been saved by the good Shepherd through his pursuit of us, and it's only by his work we get to take part.

While this may seem burdensome...the lost sheep was and are not carried on our shoulders, our fight clubs, our spouses but only of KING JESUS. While these things are a way of drawing near to God, and his work, and a way that we can fully see his beauty more. We are not the answer or the one who does the carrying. Our good, faithful, and caring King, Jesus is. The Lord of life becomes that smelly shepherd that the Pharisees do not want to associate, in order that we may have union with him.

Let's walk with the good shepherd as we traverse the wilderness of life seeking the lost and rejoicing as Jesus picks them up and places them on his shoulders as he brings them back to life. Let's engage those we may be indifferent to, let's remind ourselves daily of the pursuit of the Shepherd and his care for us.

For those here who this may be new to you, or you are just curious. Are you tired? Weary? Kind of, over it, and unsatisfied? Can I just invite you to come and drink from the life giving waters of Christ, to find out what the rejoicing in repentance is all about? Maybe visit a city group and ask questions that you have, pray and ask the Lord to help you to understand him, ask him to reveal his glory to you.

In closing...

Let's respond to all of this together as a family. Let's rejoice in repentance and the truth that we have been carried home on the shoulders of the grace through Jesus to a celebration with from our King as a family.