

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Luke 15 is all about repentance in both its broad and narrow senses. The broad sense of repentance is conversion, when someone is turned from unbelief to faith. The narrow sense of repentance is when someone turns from sin and back to a godly life which is not unrelated to turning from unbelief to faith. Both things are important and have eternal consequences. All of this, though, comes to a head and you find comfort and confidence in God's compassion and mercy in Christ. Today, then, Jesus is teaching you about repentance and your life in Christ as his child.

Those two parables set the stage for this discussion, but something should be said about what happens first before Jesus tells these, at the beginning of the chapter. St. Luke recorded, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him [Jesus]. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" Did you notice what was said here in this reading? The Pharisees are upset with Jesus because he associates with sinners.

Now, let's pause for a second and clarify something. Nowhere does it say, "Jesus affirms or tolerates sin." That's what often, though, due to our sinful hearts, the sinful world, and the devil want us to read into a statement like this in the Gospels. Yet, never does Jesus approve of sin. That would not only defeat the purpose for which he came to redeem his people but would make him a liar when he calls people to repentance; to turn from their sin. Sin is a problem, a real deadly problem and condition that rightly stands under God's wrath and punishment. Jesus himself said earlier in Luke 5, in fact to the Pharisees who said something almost identical to this statement in our Gospel reading which is ten chapters later in Luke 15. In Luke 5 it is written, "And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?' And Jesus answered them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'" Jesus associated with sinners to call them to repentance because he came to save them. When he associated with sinners, he taught them and preached to them.

Now, bringing this up again to Jesus, he answered them. But how did he do this? Well, he did it with these three parables, or it could be argued it's all really one big parable, this whole chapter, to teach them about repentance and to teach them about who God is, who, by the way, they are rejecting by their self-righteousness and failing to see the Lord who has shown them mercy and is in their midst before their faces. Notice then what Luke wrote inspired by the Holy Spirit, that Jesus did in answer to the charge and accusation of the Pharisees against Jesus.

So he [Jesus] 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? 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."

Jesus laid before them, and you that God cares for his people. He goes after those who have gone astray. He came to seek and to save the lost, to save you. He still is going after those who are outside his flock. He sends out his word to accomplish his purpose of working repentance. The Holy Spirit through the word of God converts people. God's law reveals their sin and kills. The Gospel creates faith and delivers Christ and his forgiveness, life, and salvation. This is all God's work fully and completely even as he uses human instruments such as missionaries, pastors, and every Christian in his vocation to speak the words of God and confess Christ to the world. Luke 14 ends with Jesus saying, "Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear." God calls us all to hear and to confess his word, to be salt of the earth that has not lost its saltiness.

A fascinating detail included in this parable about the lost sheep is expanded upon in the second parable about the lost coin. Again, Jesus said, “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, for 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.”

That’s something to think about right now as you listen to the words of your Lord. There is joy in heaven and joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Why is that? God reveals to you in these readings today something about himself in all of this and what, in Christ, you see is his will and work. Listen again to the Old Testament reading, “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.”

There is joy in heaven and before the angels over one sinner who repents because this is God’s delight. Micah prophesied, “He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot.” God’s anger is real and righteous but in Christ this anger is appeased by the one who is your substitute. Jesus is the one prophesied who would crush the head of the serpent and who will put all enemies under his feet forever. You see that God’s delight and joy is in saving people. His delight and joy are in saving you. And you know what? God is delighted and joyous today because you have been redeemed by Christ.

The compassion of God cannot be overstated. It really can’t. God’s compassion is toward sinners because he has redeemed them with the cost of his own blood. God’s mercy is only on account of Christ and his perfect life and atoning death otherwise God would not be just, and he would be a liar. For just as God’s compassion can’t be overstated, so too, our sin and what it brings about can’t be understated.

The final parable in this chapter, which comes right after our reading ends is the Prodigal Son. It shows God’s compassion by way of this father and his son who went off and wasted his inheritance. He returned to his father. His father showed him mercy and rejoiced that his son was back. The other son missed the point, like the Pharisees. Rather than rejoicing in the mercy and compassion of his own father he was bitter and angry that his brother should be forgiven. That’s demonic, to say the least. It’s something, though, we see in our society and in our own sinful hearts. God calls us to not despise his mercy and compassion but to rejoice with him who has shown us that same mercy in Christ. There is great joy for all of those at the feast for this son who had sinned and returned to the father trusting in him and his forgiveness.

That is all Luke 15, a wonderful chapter in the Scriptures. Listen to this all and take to heart what Jesus is teaching you. Repentance is seen in this chapter of the Bible, and it has two parts: contrition and faith. Contrition is a sorrow or terror over one’s sin and faith is that which trusts and clings to Christ and his forgiveness. This is especially seen in the Prodigal Son. “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

God calls you to take this all to heart and see who you are in this world. Sin is deadly. Don’t fall prey to the lies of the devil that try to downplay the seriousness of sin in your life. The devil, the world, and your own fallen flesh are deadly. “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” Left unchecked they will kill you and you will be lost eternally. That’s the judgment of God and its true and righteous. Daily examine your life and crucify that old man who still hangs around your neck. The baptismal life is daily drowning him that is turning away from those things which are

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sinful and contrary to God's word. The old man, however, is a good swimmer, and the struggle is not over until you depart this life. Don't grow complacent and forget who you are and who God has called you to be as his child and the new life you are to live in him. Repent. Hear and treasure his word and delight in what the Lord teaches you.

Fix your eyes on Jesus and see his compassion and mercy toward you as he is the righteous one in whom there is no deceit. By his life and crucifixion unto death for you he has accomplished your salvation. You like sheep have gone astray and he has found you. He came down from heaven and found you who are more precious than a lost coin. He didn't waste away his inheritance but laid it aside so that you would be redeemed and have a place at the feast thrown for you in your honor by the Father. That's what you have in Christ as your sin is forgiven and you have eternal life. There's great joy in heaven over you who have been called by the Gospel and given faith in Christ. Your baptism day was a party in heaven and there is still rejoicing as your Lord continues to forgive you and guard and keep you in his care. There is great joy in heaven this day as your sin is forgiven and you have new life in Christ. The day is coming as well when you will see that joy and experience it fully and with all the company of heaven and all the angels. On that day the joy will not end as you are raised from your grave and take your place with your brothers and sisters in Christ sitting at the feast prepared for you. Rejoice, even now, in what you have in Christ and what awaits you forever because God has had mercy and compassion upon you. He has sought you, found you, brought you near to himself and keeps you now and forever.

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