

The Parable of the Lost Sheep, Steve Canazzarro, July 5, 2020

Key Scripture | Luke 15:1-7 (main text), Ezekiel 34:11-16

Sermon | Luke 15:1-7

Opening thoughts—

Do you know Jesus? Are you feeling far from Jesus? Well, consider what he might be saying to *you* through this parable today.

Background—

This passage is the first of three successive parables (Luke 15) on God's pursuit of his people and the Kingdom of God.

Jesus tells this parable while on his way to Jerusalem. "He set his face to Jerusalem..." (Luke 9:51). Jesus knew what was going to happen to him in Jerusalem (i.e., cross).

On this journey, Jesus' teaching becomes very clear and pointed. (E.g., "Bear good fruit"; "Store up treasures in heaven"; "Bear your cross.")

Jesus' listeners are the Jewish leaders (Scribes and Pharisees)—they are learned, devout, and self-righteous. They are specific in their obedience to the law, yet their hearts are *far from God*. (Consider the "woe" passages in Matthew 23.)

The Scribes and Pharisees see *others* as outcasts and less-than. They would not even associate with tax collectors and "sinners."

Surface-level problem: They're upset that Jesus welcomes tax collectors and sinners *and eats and drinks with them*.

Heart-level problem: They don't know God's love or mercy. They don't see their own unrighteousness. They don't know that they're lost. They don't recognize that God is in their midst.

How does Jesus respond? He tells them the story of the lost sheep.

Have you ever reflected on your own thoughts, motives, and actions and discovered you're acting with the heart of a "Pharisee"? In what areas of life are you tempted to act in this way?

Sermon Focus | Why does Jesus tell the story of the lost sheep? 3 reasons.

(1) *To know something about the character of God*

How might we describe the shepherd in the story? He is caring, responsible, proactive, and he finishes things. He is strong, compassionate, relational, and remarkably invitational.

What else do you observe about the shepherd in this passage? Take a few minutes to read the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). What qualities do you see in the father in this passage?

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This man is a picture of God—the good shepherd. The image of God as the good shepherd is used throughout the Bible “(Ezekiel 34:11-16).

We see these characteristics most clearly in the person of Jesus.

“The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep” (John 10:11-18).

What was Jesus’ motivation? God’s love for his people.
What did Jesus do? He pursues us. (Consider the song [Reckless Love by Cory Asbury](#).)

“He became sin who knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21).

“Just as the shepherd did not sit by idly when his sheep was lost so our Lord did not sit in heaven...but he left the glory of heaven and came down into the world and saved which was lost, never resting until he made atonement and provided eternal redemption to all who are willing...this is the character of God.” —JC Ryle (first Anglican bishop of Liverpool)

What do we love about stories of daring rescue? Consider Les Mis, Lion King, or Saving Private Ryan (“earn this”). These stories are shadows of the ultimate daring rescue—Jesus’ work on the cross (“receive this”).

Modern stories (movies, novels) can work like parables in that they “slip past our mental defenses” to relay important truth to our *hearts*. What are some of your favorite stories of daring rescue? Have you ever seen these in a Gospel-light?

Jesus’ pursuit of us is a concrete truth. And it simply requires that we put our faith in God, that we might receive the abundant life Jesus offers.

God is the good shepherd who finds us and restores us.

(2) *To know something about the importance of God’s people*

We don’t know anything about the sheep. Why is it lost? We don’t know. All we know is that, though it’s the once percent, the shepherd does not see it as being inconsequential. All people matter to God, even those the world considers corrupt, useless, or worthless.

We were created in God’s image. God knows us.

Jesus pursues us and calls us out of darkness and into his marvelous light. Why? To do his work and speak out for him. Why is this important? The lie from the beginning is that God does not see, care, he’s holding out on us.

But God turns ashes → beauty. We need to remember that by God’s grace Jesus would leave the 99 to find us, put us on his shoulders, and bring us safely home.

Have you ever thought, “God is holding out on me”? When do you find yourself saying this? If during difficult times, how does God change your heart from this thought to, “God will turn ashes into beauty”?

(3) *To know something of the joys of the kingdom of heaven*

There will be more joy in heaven over 1 that repents than the 99. God's call to us, "Join me, come do this with me."

Jesus saw the crowds and had compassion on them. He turns to disciples and says, "the harvest is plentiful and workers are few" (Matthew 9:37).

Jesus' compassion toward the crowd is incredible. The crowds were often full of destitute, dirty, miserable people. Yet he loved them. What does it take to have compassion like Jesus?

Closing thoughts—

Do you not feel near to God?

Say the welcoming word to God— "Jesus is my Master"—embracing body and soul, God's work of doing in us what he did in raising Jesus from the dead. (Romans 10:9, *The Message*)

If we want to know the joy of heaven, then we must participate in kingdom work. (That is, God's pursuit of His people.)

Consider the letter that someone wrote to Steve (affirmation, verse, prayer). Steve recognized that God was pursuing and blessing him through another person. How could you encourage someone in this way? Does someone come to mind? Try to pursue and encourage this person this week.

We can also do this for our neighbors. Reach out, share meals, have honest conversations, prepared to share about the hope that is within you!

This leads us to see others as created in God's image, as valued by him, as worthy of respect even if society marginalizes them, as people Jesus died for and called us to serve in his name—realizing that as we do so, we are serving and loving God.

The world is desperate for eternal, lasting hope, and *we are called and invited to be part of God's eternal redemptive work on this earth.*

How is Christ speaking to you through this passage and sermon?

Who has God put on your heart to serve?