

Lost and Found

Luke 15:1-10

All three of parables in Luke 15 come out of the grumbling of the Pharisees and Scribes. They were grumbling because people they despised were coming to Jesus. The tax collectors and sinners were outsiders who knew they needed the fellowship of God's love, and they saw that in Jesus. And when they came, Jesus received them and ate with them. In that culture that meant He accepted them.

Lost

Jesus calls us sheep. We are like sheep because we have this in-built tendency to wander. We're lost sheep, sheep that have wandered from the fold. In the second parable Jesus says we are like a lost coin. A coin of modest value, which is lifeless (it's a coin!), and has no-way of finding itself.

But the incredible point in Jesus' parables is not that we are just lost, we are also loved, and so can be found.

Found

Rather than leave people in that lost state, God goes in search of them, because He loves them. And it's the shepherd (and the woman) who takes all the initiative. Whilst we could grasp a God who dispensed *earned* forgiveness, what kind of a God would search out sinners who still had their backs turned to Him?

And the shepherd carries the sheep home. He doesn't give it directions! So salvation is not about us obeying the teaching of Jesus as our great moral example. This sheep has no strength of its own, it's too weak to return on its own. So the shepherd picks it up and carries it home. Salvation, being found, is by grace.

But how does that work? It works through the shepherd becoming a sheep, a sacrificial lamb, for us. The shepherd didn't just carry a sheep on His shoulders but the cross.

Rejoicing

When the measure of God's love for you sinks in, joy will break upon your heart. The Pharisees and Scribes no doubt felt good, they got joy, by looking down at others and at how well they did in comparison. There is joy in the Community of the Self-Righteous. But Jesus is building a different kind of community: a community of grace. A community marked not by joy at excluding others, but joy at welcoming others.

And Jesus says we should find our joy in God's grace. In his love to us and others. And the source of that joy is God's own joy.

So whilst the Pharisees meant "This man receives sinners and eats with them", as a complaint, actually, it's as a compliment. Because that is just what Jesus does! He receives sinners and He eats with them.