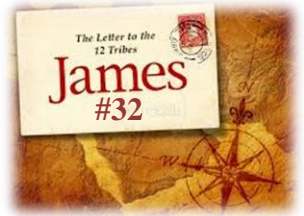




Chico Alliance Church
November 4, 2018
Pastor David Welch



“Celestial Celebrations”

Luke 15:1-32

Introduction

Last week we explored the attitude toward the wayward, lost, sinners, stumbling, straying James prescribes for every follower of Jesus.

My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. James 5:19-20

He wants us to know that the effort to turn anyone back to a healthy walk with the Lord is worth it. In my effort to discover the proper attitude we should have, I wondered what the Bible reveals about God's feelings toward the lost. The Bible makes it very clear how God feels about the spiritually lost.

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Luke 19:10

How does God feel about the wayward or the ones who wander off the path? Jesus taught a set of parables dealing with those who stray away from the path. James made it clear that EVERYONE strays or stumbles or deviates from the path.

We ALL stumble in MANY ways. James 3:2

The whole letter addressed areas in which we fail to live by genuine faith. The whole Bible serves as a tool to keep us on the path.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Teaching lays out the path.

Reproof tells when we have strayed from the path.

Correction show the way back to the path.

Training in righteousness tells us how to stay on the path; all so we can become mature and equipped to best serve God.

Satan would have us believe that God hovers over us ready to club us every time we step out of line. He wants us to think that God stands with arms crossed and face scowled. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, but you missed it. You have been disqualified. You are no longer loved. I believe that Jesus taught otherwise in His use of three parables round in Luke 15.

How does God really feel about those who have ignored the internal homing beacon? The answer can be found in three stories or parables the Jesus told to make a specific point. Jesus generally used parables to address a specific situation. Most parables have a trigger event. Discern the event and you will understand the point of the parable.

I. The situation

Jesus interacted with two groups of people. Jesus related these stories to emphasize how God really feels about lost people.

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." Luke 15:1-2

A. Tax collectors and sinners

Tax collectors collected money for the Roman government. The money they collected was more like a customs or tariff on goods. They could be Romans, but the office was also filled by native Jews. They were not always honest. They often collected more than required. Their countrymen considered them collaborators, turncoats, extortionists, thieves. Matthew was a tax collector. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector. They were hated and ranked with harlots on the popularity scale. Sinners were anyone else not considered part of the spiritual elite. These were people to be avoided and rejected. They were certainly not worthy of inclusion in the community of God. These tax collectors and sinners however, seemed to have a heart to learn. They came to listen to what Jesus had to say.

B. The Pharisees and Scribes

Pharisees considered themselves above everyone else. They fancied themselves as the holy gatekeepers commissioned to protect the kingdom from all undesirables and sinners. The response of these people was not what we might expect from godly people. When they noticed Jesus receiving and connecting to the very people they were sworn to despise, they boldly verbalized their disapproval. They “grumbled”. It means to mutter complain, murmur stemming from a strong personal negative attitude. Their negative attitude is obvious by their reference to Jesus: “this man.” Jesus not only welcomed tax collectors and sinners, He ate with them like they were His friends. This rotted the socks off the spiritual elite. Their prejudice was palpable. Prejudice groups people together according to some external criteria, slaps on a label and then always views them according to their classification rather than individual characteristics.

C. Jesus

Jesus – Yahweh saves. The Good Shepherd. Son of God. Jesus responded much differently than anyone expected. Here is a highly respected teacher, a devout Jew with royal blood associating with low life. He received them, welcomed them, accepted them and even sought to connect with them. To receive someone is to draw them into your circle, cherish, accept, or anxiously wait. Jesus not only received them but went even further by eating with them. Eating a meal together in that culture was a sign of acceptance, hospitality and close fellowship.

Jesus connected with these people because He valued them. He considered all of them as image bearers of His Father in need of the truth. These were “hungry sinners”. They gathered to hear what Jesus had to say about God. Jesus told these parables to address the prejudicial attitudes and actions of the religious leaders toward people outside their circle.

There are lessons to learn for those feeling distant from God and long to know how God really feels about them.

II. The Stories

Common elements in each parable

- Each story focused on someone or something “lost” that had previously connection.
- Each parable highlighted the action of the owner toward the lost.
- Each parable included the eventual repentance or return of the lost.
- Each parable emphasized the jubilant response at the return of the lost.

Unique elements in each parable

- Each story highlights a different reason for being lost.
- Each story highlights a slightly different aspect of the owner’s “search”.

A. The Lost Sheep 15:3-7

So He told them this parable, saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which 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 which was lost!'" Jesus drew everyone into the action. In this parable the lostness was due to **"wandering away"**.

This parable emphasizes the **PRIORITY** of the search.

He left the safe ones to search for the lost one.

- Lost to usefulness to the owner.
- Lost to community and fellowship with the shepherd and the flock.
- Lost to protection of the sheepfold.

When we stray from God's path...

We lose usefulness in ministry.

We forfeit fellowship with God and other believers.

We reject the protection and covering of the community of believers.

Sheep tend to wander off for any number of reasons. Distraction, deception, depression, detours, diversion. Jesus highlighted the heart of the Father to seek lost sheep and return them to the fold. This shepherd searched for the wayward sheep until he found it. The shepherd abandoned his own comfort and fellowship to venture out into the elements to find, rescue and return the lost sheep.

This shepherd found the lost sheep and carried it back to the rest of the fold on his shoulders.

- Resorted to usefulness to the shepherd.
- Restored to fellowship with the other sheep.
- Restored to the protection of the sheepfold.

Are you a lost sheep? Have you wandered away from God's loving protection? Have you rejected community with other sheep? Have you forfeited protection that comes from community? The Good Shepherd continually seeks to return you to the fold. It is His priority to do whatever it takes to get you back into the fold. He sends whoever is willing to help in the search.

What was the response to the return of the lost sheep?

"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 which was lost!'"

Party time. Celebrating restoration of the wayward is a community function. Jesus applied the parable to heavenly attitudes and activity.

I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Heaven parties when lost sheep return to where they were called to be. Anytime we recognize that we have been going the wrong direction or thinking the wrong way and turn around and change our thinking, heaven parties. Who in heaven rejoices? The wording of the next parable provides additional insight. I think angels celebrate repentance, which is what I have always thought. But according to the second parable, the rejoicing takes place "in the presence of the angels." Perhaps this spontaneous outburst of rejoicing comes from those already in heaven awaiting the completion of God's plan for His sheep. I can't help but think that God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit express their joy in the presence of the angels. God parties. Angels party. All those who have trusted Christ for salvation party. We also ought to celebrate here on earth what God celebrates in heaven.

The spontaneous rejoicing of the shepherd and his friends is in direct contrast to the “grumbling” of those self-righteous who had no concern for the lost. The sheep wandered off and got lost. The shepherd made it His priority to find the lost sheep and return it to the fold.

B. The Lost Coins

"Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? "When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Luke 15:8-10

Again, Jesus draws the audience into the action or situation. Some of the same elements appear in the second parable.

The owner lost something considered important and valuable.

The owner searched for the lost item until she found it.

The owner invited others to share in the joy of finding what was lost.

In this case, the coin became lost during the chaos of everyday life. Some get lost in the hectic pace of life.

They get carried away by the crowd. They find themselves buried by life's debris.

The first parable focused on the **priority** of the search in leaving the 99 sheep.

The second emphasized the **passion** of the search, the energy expended; the perseverance.

She lit a lamp, swept the house and searched carefully until she found it. This parable points to God's passionate and persistent search for the lost. It is God's heart to return the lost to Himself and the community. In both of these parables, the lost item was returned (repented) by the diligent effort of the owner making the search a priority and pursuing it with passion. The repentance of one lost soul is again a great cause for celestial celebration. All of heaven rejoices. God longs for us to return to Him. He created us to live in unified community with Him and other followers of Christ.

C. The Lost Sons

Jesus' last story focuses on the dynamics within a family. We may have learned the parable as the parable of the prodigal son. In reality, Jesus highlighted the waywardness of two sons. Both sons were self-centered. Both sons failed to appreciate the privilege of being sons. Neither son enjoyed an intimate relationship with his father. Both sons had heart problems. Both sons were “out of their senses.”

SON #1

A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Luke 15:12-13

This son portrays the spiritual state of the tax collectors and sinners.

The son took the father's love for granted.

He had little appreciation for the heritage provided as a son.

He failed to appreciate family connection and community.

He was only concerned with his own passions.

He was self-centered and demanded his share of the estate from the father.

He refused to associate with the father or live under his protective way of life.

He rebelled and demanded to do his own thing.

Sounds a lot like many people today. His self-indulgent lifestyle was evident by the short amount of time it took to squander all his father-provided resources. There are many today who have squandered their God-given resources for self-indulgent purposes. They have no sense of community or service or family. They have

resisted community with God or His children. They resist God's ways. Eventually God allows them to hit bottom and hopefully "come to their senses."

Because this son purposely walked away, it would take a decision on his part to return. The Father did not chase after him or seek him or support his self-indulgent lifestyle. The harsh consequences of a rebellious life brought him to a logical conclusion.

Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.' Luke 15:14-19

He realized the error of his rebellious choices and chose to return home with a humbled heart. The response of the father is informative. Jesus provides a glimpse at the heart of our Heavenly Father.

The Father's response

1. He anticipated his son's return

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him...

I feel like the father continually watched for and anticipated the son's return.

2. He was filled with compassion

and was filled with compassion

For many of us that might not be our first emotion. This is a powerful word indicating a deep emotional surge that draws us to respond with mercy and kindness to someone in need.

3. He enthusiastically initiated the reconnection with his son

and ran and embraced him and kissed him

He approached his son. You get the picture of him running down the road throwing his arms around him. He initiated a physical touch. Literally, "and tears fell on the neck of him (the son) and he kissed him.

4. He listened to his son

"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

He allowed his son to verbalize his new perspective.

5. He fully restored his son and affirmed his sonship

"But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet

The father affirmed the unbroken relationship. He was still his son not a slave.

6. He called for a public celebration of his son's return

and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

Have you walked away from the Father? Have you come to the end of your resources? Have you come to realize the gravity of your action toward your heavenly Father and how miserably you have fallen short of the required mark? How deeply you have offended Him? Because of Christ, you can be reunited with your Heavenly Father. Will He receive you with open not crossed arms? Jesus received tax collectors and sinners.

The Father received the repentant son. The point of the parable is that Jesus came to seek and save that which was lost, wandered off, whisked off, walked away. The unbroken love of God waits to embrace you today.

As in many of His parables, Jesus had a zinger for the Pharisees and scribes. The second son represents the attitudes of the grumbling Pharisees.

SON #2

Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' Luke 15:27-30

You see, the other son was not in close relationship with the Father either. He didn't want to celebrate with the father but with his friends. Oh, he didn't walk away physically but had distanced himself emotionally. He had not realized the privilege of Sonship any more than the younger son. He resented the father's mercy on his brother. Many are like the older son. They try to serve God. They try to keep the rules. Their heart is cold and self-centered. They harbor resentment and judgment toward others. They are in it for what they can get. There don't cultivate intimate relationship with God.

How did the father respond to the second errant son? We find the same loving heart reach out to the older son. *And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'*

I think all the things we mentioned last week about how we should be toward the wayward reflects what God feels.

- He is the God of all encouragement.
- He is the God of gentle restoration.
- He is the God who shares our burdens.
- He is the God of mercy on the doubting and sinning.
- He is the God ready to snatch us from the fire.
- He is the God who instills the truth that sets free.
- He is the God who gently converses with us and lovingly disciplines us.
- He is the God who forgives.
- He is the God who will let us go our own way.
- He is the God who reaffirms His love.
- He is the God who ever lives to intercede for us.

How can we not respond to such a loving Father? No matter where you have been. No matter where you are right now. Come to your senses. Arise. Return to your father. Return to the community. Return to ministry. Return to His protection.