

The Joy of Finding What was Lost

Have you ever watched the celebration of fans on the opposing team and think to yourself *“That’s a little too much now! Simmer down!”* Or watched the victory dance of a family member you lost a board game to and all you can do is roll your eyes? According to the religious leaders of the day Jesus ate with the “opposing team” and celebrated in a way that caused some eye rolling. Why would Jesus eat with outcasts and traitors? Jesus’ answer has everything to do with the joy of finding what was lost. Luke 15:1-32

1. The joy of heaven
 2. The love of a father
 3. The reason Jesus ate w/ sinners
 4. The invitation before us
- 1. The joy of heaven** | this is what God celebrates (Luke 15:1-10)

“Tax collectors and sinners” is a way to summarize Jesus was attracting outcasts, people on the sidelines of society. Tax collectors were known as traitors and cheaters (worked for Rome – the enemy!) – couldn’t be trusted. Sinners = those who didn’t obey God or follow his laws – a broad category that covered a wide range of people. Imagine that. Outcasts, those who didn’t fit into the religious system - drawn to Jesus. And not because Jesus was compromising his message or because he ignored sin. He spoke truth in love. He opened his life to them and stepped into theirs. This messed with the religious elite – the “Pharisees and scribes” were grumbling and complaining that Jesus ate with (had table fellowship = befriended) sinners. = Jesus’ critics! Picture it – tax collectors and sinners on one side AND the self-appointed religious experts on the other. Jesus answers his critics with three memorable parables.

VV3-7 A man (presumably a shepherd!) loses one sheep – since he’s a faithful shepherd and understands the value of his flock, he goes after that one sheep. Leaves the ninety-nine *“until he finds it.”* Then he lays the sheep on his shoulders (tired) and brings it home – rejoicing! God is portrayed this way in Psalm 28:9; Isaiah 40:11 He doesn’t stop there. He’s so happy about it he invites others *into his joy.* *Everyone knows how horrible it feels to lose something valuable. Whether it’s your phone, wedding ring or even a favorite T shirt - you’ll search *everywhere* and won’t stop until you find it! The greater the value is of whatever you lost, the greater the joy when you find it. Then Jesus draws a line from this man (shepherd) ALL THE WAY to what’s happening in heaven = *“over one sinner who repents”* – *“there is MORE joy for one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance”* (winky face / smiley face)

Joy in heaven? Jesus is telling us about the atmosphere of heaven. It’s one of great joy and celebration over a particular thing = the repentance of a sinner. It gets rowdy! Repent = own up to the fact you’re a sinner, turn away from it + turn to God for grace. It’s required for entrance into kingdom + becomes a lifestyle.

VV8-10 A woman has ten silver coins and loses one. She isn’t thinking, *“I have nine – I’m good!”* She’s searches diligently – sweeps house! And when she finds it she too calls her neighbors and friends and celebrates. V10 *“Just so…”* Again we’re told about the joy in heaven... This double emphasis (repetition) is a way to highlight, underline and place a huge exclamation point on what’s being said.

2. The love of a father | this is what God is like (Luke 15:11-32)

A man has two sons and the youngest comes to him and asks for his share of the inheritance (property) right then and there. This was usually done at the end of life. The request is more than inappropriate it's disgraceful – the crowds would have been like, *“he asked for what? He wants the inheritance + the power to do what he wants?”* It's as if the son is saying *“Dad, I wish you were dead!”* The father's response is equally shocking – he gives it to him! *“What is happening?”* The son cashes it all in (property sold off to someone else! Dishonoring; shameful!)

V13 took a journey “into a far country” – he's finally “free”!
He can do whatever he wants (does just that!) out from under every restriction.
He squanders it all on reckless living – then a famine hit and he was done for.
Destitute / alone. In a far country, gentile territory, feeding pigs (unclean) = bleak.
Maybe you can relate?
It's in his darkest moment that *“he came to himself”* V17-19! He woke up!
Comes up with a plan and a speech - begins to make his way back home.
His speech is sincere BTW. He owns up to the fact that he sinned against his father and against heaven = Jewish way of referring to God w/ out saying name.
This is much deeper than “regret”!

V20 the father saw him – heart pounding – “felt *compassion*” and ran and embraced and kissed him (lit = fell on his neck).
None of this is appropriate! It's an undignified thing for a grown man to do this in front of others (his servants) – and a man of wealth and status! The father doesn't care how undignified / humiliating it is!

The son begins his speech – dad interrupts! *“Yes, yes, yes...servants bring the best robe (had to belong to the father!) and put it on him, bring a ring (most likely a signet ring representing membership in the family and authority as a son), shoes on his feet (servants were barefoot – but not sons!) – prepare the fattened calf (what we reserve for the greatest of celebrations – and invite the entire community to enjoy!)”...what? why?!*

V24 is why = a picture of God the Father's pardoning love. Extravagant grace.
Portrait painted

Make sure we hold up whatever picture of God you have in your head to *this one*.
We're all tempted to come up with a god of our own imagination.
Tozer: *“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.”*
The son received much more than expected – his father gave him what he couldn't fix on his own: a restored relationship!
God's *love* and *joy* for you is SO great it's going to be hard to understand...Romans 5:6-8; 1 John 4:9-10

VV25-32 The older son comes back from the fields - heard music and dancing – smelled the BBQ and wondered what was going on. Angry / refused to go in!

According to middle-eastern custom, the oldest son should have gone after the younger brother - been the main reconciler between father and son. Instead he refuses to join in the celebration (feast!) which is a GREAT insult. Once again, the father goes after his son - doesn't smack him or walk away in disgust - this time making appeals to his older son to come to the feast!

The older son unloads on his dad - he was bumped hard and now it's spilling out! Disrespectful, demeaning, accusatory and dishonoring. V29 "Look..." (not, "father, sir") This is in front of the whole family / community. "I served you...I NEVER disobeyed...you NEVER gave me...but when this son of yours" (can't even say brother) What's he saying? "This isn't FAIR! He deserves to remain destitute - an outcast!" Do you feel the resentment / bitterness? The accusation? The self-righteousness? (I did this, I did that = I deserve more) - a sense of moral superiority and pride. You'll never forgive someone you feel superior to (better than)! It's blinding him to the grace he's received (always been there + still available).

The older son represents the religious leaders. Jesus is answering his critics! The older son can't wrap his mind around the father's grace extended to his brother (refuses to see it as grace) AND he can't see the grace extended to him! Grace = God's undeserved love. It can't be earned and is freely given to all who will receive it. VV31-32!

Jesus is shattering the religious leaders' categories but also making an appeal to enter the feast. Will they? We're not told. The story ends in a way that invites us to consider how we fit into it - what *our* response will be.

3. The reason Jesus ate with sinners | this is what God sent Jesus to do (Luke 15:32)

Jesus is saying "The celebrating I'm doing is the only appropriate response - because what was lost is now found! This is the work I was sent to do - to seek and save the lost - bring the dead to life. Celebrate with me!"

4. The invitation before us today

- You can return home to God! He's *ready* to welcome you home.
- Join the celebration. Do you hear the music? Smell the food?
- See God for who he really is and grace for what it really does.

Remember how horrible it felt to lose something valuable? Remember what it felt like when you found it, how you reacted?

The table is set. The music is on. Heaven is rejoicing.

The joy of finding what was lost IS the joy we're invited into.