

Week of March 19 - 25

Rejoicing when the Lost Are Found (Luke 15:1-32)

As sinners and other wretched characters came to hear what Jesus had to say, the Pharisees and scribes murmured because he was attracting social outcasts. So, Jesus told them a story.

“Who among you if you had a hundred sheep would not be concerned if one of them was missing,” he began. “Would he not leave his flock to search until he found it? And when he found it, dirty and matted and scraped, would he not put it on his shoulders and gladly carry it all the way home? And when he got it home, would he not tell his friends and neighbors how relieved he was to have found his lost sheep?”

“Likewise, I tell you, Heaven rejoices more over the one sinner that repents than over ninety-nine righteous people that don’t need to.

“What woman who has ten silver coins wouldn’t light a candle and comb the house if she found one missing? And when she found it, she would call her friends and neighbors to tell them how glad she was to have found her lost coin. Likewise, the angels of God rejoice over every sinner that repents.”

Then he said, “A certain man had two sons. The younger pressed his father for his inheritance, so their father divided his property between them. The young man gathered his belongings and moved to a distant land where he lived lavishly and soon squandered his entire estate. When all the money was gone, a terrible famine struck the land, and he became desperate, so he took a job feeding a local farmer’s pigs. There was little to eat, and no one helped him out, so he started longing for the garbage he was feeding the pigs. Then it finally dawned on him that his father’s servants back home had plenty to eat while he was alone and starving.

‘I’ll go back home and admit that I have sinned against Heaven and against my father,’ he concluded. ‘I am no longer worthy of being called my father’s son, but perhaps he will hire me as one of his servants.’

“So, he got up and returned home. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and ran to meet him. He embraced him and kissed him. But his son humbly backed away, saying, ‘Father, I’ve sinned against Heaven and dishonored you. I am not worthy of being called your son.’

“But his father told his servants to bring his best coat to put on his son and to get a ring for his finger and shoes for his feet. Then he told them to kill a calf and cook it because they were going to celebrate. ‘My son was dead, but now he is alive again. He was lost but now has returned!’ the father exclaimed. And they were all excited.

“When his older brother came in from the field that evening, he heard music and saw people dancing and having a wonderful time. He asked one of the servants what was going on. When he learned that his brother had returned and a reception was being held in his brother’s honor, he was upset and refused to go inside. So, his father came out to speak to him.”

“‘I devoted myself to you many years, never complaining or resisting, and never stepping out of line. You never offered to give me a party so I might entertain my friends,’ he objected. ‘Now, my little brother comes back after wasting your estate on whores and drunken parties, and you give him a banquet.’

“Son,’ he responded with understanding and compassion, ‘you are always at my side, and everything I have is yours. It’s proper to celebrate. Your brother was dead to us, and now he is alive again. He was lost, and now he is restored to us’”

This is one of the best-known and best-loved chapters in the whole Bible. Three parables show God’s joy when a lost sinner is found. The fact that the first two parables describe people who actively seek what is lost may well emphasize the truth that God does not wait patiently for sinners to come to him, but actively seeks them out. The lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son all refer to unbelievers, and Jesus goes out and finds them, and brings them back to Himself.

The Pharisees taught that there is joy before God when those who provoke him die, that God hates sinners and withdraws from them. But Christ welcomed sinners and even ate with them. Therefore, according to the Pharisees, Jesus could not be God.

Teaching on Divorce (Matthew 19:1-12; Mark 10:1-12)

Jesus left Galilee and went back to Judea, where vast crowds followed him. Some Pharisees tried to trap him into saying something that would ruin him. “Do you permit divorce?” they asked.

“Have you not read that in the beginning God made man and woman and said, ‘For this cause, a man will leave his home and unite with his wife, so they become one entity?’ Therefore, they are no longer separate, but a single unit, becoming one. Men should not separate what God intended to be united,” Jesus stated.

“So why did Moses institute divorce?” the Pharisee probed. “Moses gave you the concession to accommodate people’s hard and evil hearts,” Jesus declared. “But that was never God’s intention.”

Once outside, Jesus’ disciples brought the matter up again. So Jesus expounded, “Whoever divorces his wife for any cause other than marital unfaithfulness and marries someone else commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” When his disciples concluded it might not be such a good idea to get married in the first place, Jesus said, “Not everyone can live like this – only those who can endure. Some people are destined to remain single by virtue of their birth. Some are compelled by circumstances imposed on them. And some choose to remain celibate for the sake of spiritual pursuit. Let each determine his own course.”

The general teaching of the New Testament is that divorce is contrary to God’s will and that remarriage following divorce constitutes adultery. Note that there is one exception to this general rule. Jesus taught that the only reason a second marriage after divorce was considered adultery was that the first marriage still stood in the sight of God.

Some theologians believe there are other reasons for divorce, such as abuse or abandonment. What do you think?

Jesus Blesses the Little Children (Matthew 19:13-15; Mark 10:13-16; Luke 18:15-17)

Some parents brought their children to see Jesus, hoping he would put his hand on them and pray over them. When Jesus saw that his disciples were turning them away, he said, “Let the children come to me. I encourage it. The Kingdom of Heaven is composed of such as these.

Only the innocent can enter God's kingdom." And he picked each of them up and blessed them before he departed.

This story show that contrary to the Pharisees self-righteousness, the simple, humble trust that is necessary and shown by children is necessary to enter the kingdom of Heaven.

Riches and the Kingdom (Matthew 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)

A local dignitary ran to meet them along the way and bowing before Jesus asked what he had to do to obtain everlasting life. "Why do you call me 'Good Master,'" asked Jesus. "The only truly good master is God. Nevertheless, if you want to inherit life, you must observe God's rules for living: Don't murder. Don't steal. Don't commit adultery. Don't lie. Respect the ways of your parents. And have regard for others." He told Jesus he had always observed the law and asked if there was anything else he should do. Jesus liked what he saw and said, "There is one thing that stands in your way. Sell everything you own and give the proceeds to those who have need. Then you will inherit a spiritual fortune when you come and follow me."

Hearing that, the young man went away sad because he was wealthy and couldn't part with his possessions. Jesus looked at his disciples and said, "It's hard for people who are preoccupied with their material well-being to enter the spiritual kingdom. It's easier to pull a camel through a tiny door than to draw a materialistic person into the kingdom of Heaven."

His disciples were dumbfounded. "Then what hope does anyone have?" they asked. Jesus conceded it is humanly impossible to avoid materialism totally, but he advised them that in God's economy, anything is possible. "Look, we've given up everything to follow you," Peter said, "What's that going to get us?" Jesus replied, "You will have a place in my kingdom because you have forsaken relationships and possessions for my sake so we could spread the good news. Whatever anyone gives up to follow me will be compounded and returned many times over in this life and eternity. Many who are prominent now will go to the end of the line. And many who don't have anything to show will come to the forefront."

Jesus gave the man something to do that would reveal his unrighteousness - sell everything and give it to the poor. This fulfills the law requiring one to love one's neighbor as oneself. His unwillingness to sell his possessions also showed he did not satisfy the law forbidding him to have other gods above the true God. His wealth stood in the way of his following Jesus. What gets in your way of following Jesus?

Instruction about Eternal Life (Matthew 19:16 - 20:16; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30)

"The kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner that went out at 6 am to hire people to work in his vineyard. He offered them a daily wage, and they agreed to work in his field. At 9 am, he found others standing idly in the marketplace and offered to pay them a fair wage if they would work in his field. Then, at noon, he did likewise. At 5 pm, he discovered more idle workers and asked them why they weren't working. When they reported that no one had offered to hire them, he told them to go into his field, and he would give them an appropriate reward.

"When evening came, the owner of the field told his supervisor to call the laborers from the field and pay them their wages starting with the ones who had come last. Those who came at 5 pm each received a full day's wage. When those who started at 6 am got in line, they supposed they would get more, but each one received a full day's wage. So, they complained to the

owner because those who had worked but one hour got the same wage as those who worked through the long hot day.”

“The owner responded, saying, ‘Friends, I have not wronged you. Did you not agree to give a full day’s work for a day’s wage? Take what you have earned and be on your way. I chose to pay everyone who worked for me the same wage. Is it not my right to distribute what belongs to me, however I want? Are you upset because I am generous?’ So the last shall be first and the first last. Many are invited, but few are selected.”

Christ taught through a parable about how rewards will be distributed at the end of the age. Our responsibility as Christians is to labor faithfully for him, not with a view of any reward, but to please the one who had sent them to work in the vineyard. They were to trust the graciousness of the one who had commissioned them that he would be fair in their reward. Jesus is just and fair and gracious. Has he been gracious to you? Has he ever been unfair in his dealings with you?