

Responding To Grace
Luke 15:1-10

For those of us who have given our hearts to Christ in salvation, we know that we can rest in the assurance that our salvation is complete in every way and that we are saved for all eternity. But while we know that to be true, we also know that though we be saved, our heart still does have some of the remnants of our old sinful nature remaining within it. And that those remnants will never cease to tempt our souls, cleverly grabbing hold onto our thoughts and our behaviors. And sometimes, before we can even realize what's taking place, we have wandered off in a wrong direction and into difficult troubles.

But thanks be to God, He is ever watchful and He knows when one of His sheep has wandered away. And He is a faithful Shepherd who will do whatever it takes to find and to rescue His beloved sheep.

Here in this passage of scripture that we will study today, our Lord's words are rich with meaning. They can be understood to describe how the Lord Jesus came all the way from His throne in heaven to seek and to save the souls of those who are lost.

And then also, these truths can be understood to explain how for us who have once given our hearts to Christ in salvation still have an errant propensity to wander off and out from His care. How our Lord Jesus, as the loving Shepherd of our souls will come to find us and to rescue us out of whatever sinful condition we have gotten ourselves into. And praise be to God, He will be faithful to do that.

Turn with me and let's read the passage given to us here in Luke chapter 15, beginning in verse 1.

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

³ So he told them this parable:

⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"

⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

⁶ 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 that was lost.'

⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'

¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:1-10)

There is an unspoken question that is being voiced to us within the words of this passage, and the question is this, "What should be the response of our heart to our loving and merciful Lord who, even though we sometimes, as with this lost sheep, will intentionally wander away from Him and from His gracious care, will still reach forward, with great mercy and grace, to seek and to save us out of our lost condition?"

I've often said to you that it is my nature to think in very visual terms. As I read and hear words, my mind often translates those words into visual images. And that is so with these words of Jesus.

Let me tell you how . . . here in these parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, Jesus uses simple words with visual images all intertwined within them. And we must remember as we read them that He is God and He knows how to reveal things to our minds and how to influence and to guide our thoughts.

And remember also that every word that is in these scriptures has the fullness of God's Holy Spirit still present within them, giving these words a power that is beyond all understanding. That precious promise given to us in Isaiah chapter 55.

¹¹ So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

Aren't these truths so very precious. They tell us that as we read and as we meditate on these words, God's Holy Spirit is able to reach into our minds and into our souls and produce understanding that we would not otherwise have.

And as with these and other parables, using “word pictures” and images God is able to help us to understand the deeper things of Him, as within this parable, He reveals His mercy and grace.

The word pictures within these parables give us the understanding that each one of us, as we are born into this world, are born already lost. We don't know or think that we are lost because, who we are, our place in life, our habits, our behaviors, our conduct, are all natural to us. They are all that we know and understand. So, we feel perfectly at home in whatever condition we are in, even if ours is some of the most miserable and wretched of circumstances, what other scriptures refer to as, “a crooked and perverse generation”.

Sometimes, it is the way of the family that we are born into. Many of our families today are what our psychologists call “dysfunctional”. Without a Godly Spiritual foundation, and with poor work habits, alcohol and drug abuse, families live very uncertain lives, especially the young children.

And it seems to be a common response for the children in those families to want to break away as soon as they can, especially as they get into their early teen years. Their needs are not being met within their families, so they begin to look elsewhere to have their needs met.

And unfortunately, most often, their choices are no better than the choices being made by their parents. And the cycle begins to repeat itself.

And we know also that dysfunction of that sort does not just take place in low income families or develop from parents with poor work habits. Often, it is the exact opposite. I know a family where both parents are lawyers. They work long, hard hours and they are upstanding, law-abiding people. And they send their children to the best of private schools. But still yet, their family could not be more dysfunctional.

In my visual form of thinking, I picture all these kinds of dysfunction and disarray as producing family members, moms, dads and their children as scattered and “lost” in many different ways.

Like lost and wandering sheep, they get entangled in thickets of brambles and briars. And they can't seem to free themselves. Instead of having happy productive lives, they spend their days just trying to cope with their

circumstances, continually making wrong choices, and entangling themselves deeper and deeper within the thickets of a disrupted life.

And in our modern households, those thickets can often be secluded bedrooms where a young person spends untold hours playing their video games, listening to wrong music, talking on the phone, and texting. Or another secluded bedroom where a depressed wife or husband goes to hide from their responsibilities and their stress.

Again, let me restate the problem! Whether we are young or we are old, and often, even after we have experienced the blessed salvation that the Lord Jesus gives to us, these wrong patterns and these wrong lifestyles can produce individuals and families that are as this lost sheep and as this lost coin here in these parables. We get lost, and sometimes, profoundly so.

And the lesson of these parables is that, thankfully, God is not willing to leave us in that lost condition and without hope. In His great love for us, God sent His son, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, into our world to seek and to save all of us who are lost.

And folks, please understand from these parables that God did not just issue forth a general offer of mercy and grace, hoping that you and I might stop to hear it and come and find Him. Not at all! He does so much, much more.

That's part of the sweet truth that God is revealing within this parable. The shepherd knows each of his sheep. He knows the errant one that has wandered away.

And so it is with you and me. He knows each of us intimately. And as we wander away from Him, He will immediately begin using every means necessary to bring us back into His care. And all three within the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, each will do their part to bring us into the fold and to keep us there.

And yes, in another place in these scriptures, we are told that God the Father does "call to us". And yes, God does have a speaking voice, not so that we will audibly hear Him call, but a loud "speaking voice" nonetheless, calling, calling, calling out to us, continually.

In Psalm 19, we are told that His voice goes out into all the earth, that there is no speech or language where His voice is not heard, calling, calling, calling to the sheep that are lost.

And thankfully, God the Father does not just call out to us. He also has sent the second person of God's Trinity, the Lord Jesus to us. And Jesus then, very lovingly, has stepped forward to do His part. The Son left His throne in glory to come among us to die on the cross to save us from our sins.

Use your imagination for a moment. Can't you hear the voice of God calling out your name? And can't you hear the voice of Jesus echoing His voice as He seeks for us. But unfortunately, often, because of our shame for all the things that we have done, we are reluctant to answer His call. We choose to remain entangled in the brambles and briars, ashamed and alone.

But our reluctance does not discourage Him. Still He calls to us. And as His voice comes closer and closer to us, our dilemma intensifies. We want to answer, but in our shame and embarrassment and fear we do as Adam and Eve did there in the Garden of Eden, we hide ourselves from Him. We just know that He can't forgive us after all the things we have done.

Those are the thoughts that go through our minds folks. Whether those brambles we are caught in are out in the streets with drugs and alcohol, or they are the briars of pornography, immorality, adultery, or depression, or, they are just quiet, simple pride, pride that assures us that we are right about things and everyone else is wrong. Even so, the calling voice of God still reaches our ears, and we know that the footsteps of the Son are near us.

And then, the third person of the Trinity steps forward, into our troubled minds and hearts and He begins to do His part of the work, and conviction and guilt begins to invade us.

Why? How? It is because that is the nature of the voice of the Spirit of God. In John 16 we are told that God's Spirit convicts each of us of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. And there is no exception. His voice, as it goes out into all the earth, will not return void. It will prosper in the things for which God sent it. Those words in Isaiah 55 again,

¹¹ So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me empty, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55:11)

My mind goes to all those many people who have, over this past generation attended a Billy Graham Crusade. Long before the night they went to hear Billy Graham preach, the demanding voice of God's Holy Spirit was doing its work.

And Christ, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep, came for them. First, He came to their homes and He brought them to that stadium. And then, unseen by the people in that stadium, He walked up the stairs of those bleachers, put those lost souls across His shoulders and walked them forward into changed lives.

My words are only a "figure of speech" of course. And so are these parables. And Jesus actually knows exactly where everyone of us is all of the time. He always knows where His sheep are, both the ones already in His flock and the ones who have wandered off.

And He knows where the lost ones have been and all the things they have done, even the ones that have done awful and wicked and perverse things, immorality, lying and stealing. But still He calls out to them.

Why does He call? If He already knows where we are and what we have done, why does He still call? If He wants us to come to Him, why doesn't He just climb into those brambles and the briars and force us to come with Him?

Well, actually, sometimes He does exactly that. In a recent passage that we studied, we read that as He sent His servants out to find people to come to His "wedding banquet", He instructed His servants to "compel", to "force" some people to come.

So yes, sometimes He actually does reach into our hiding place, uninvited, and He drags us into His mercy and grace.

But most of the time He does not do it that way. Most of the time He pursues us, He finds us, and then He calls for us within the brambles, and then waits for us to respond. And sometimes, He stands there and calls and waits, and calls and waits, and calls and waits for a very long time.

What is He waiting for? He is waiting for us to do our part. He is waiting for us to give a very special and very important kind of response, the response of “repentance”.

The lesson within these first two parables is that Jesus does most all of the pursuing and finding, both with the lost sheep and with the lost coin. Next week, I hope for us to study all that took place within the heart of the “prodigal son” whom He left to struggle in his brambles and briars for a very long time.

But for all of these, the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son, “repentance” was God’s desired response. Listen again to the words of Luke 15, verse 7,

⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. (Luke 15:7)

And then in verse 10,

¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (Luke 15:10)

Folks, imagine these words for just a moment. These words tell us plainly that our response of “repentance” causes shouts of joy to ring out all through the heavens. As you read through these scriptures you won’t find many other such profound occasions being spoken about.

Repentance is so very special to God. Repentance means that our wretched souls have finally seen the vileness of sin “from God’s viewpoint and perspective”.

Let me say that again because God’s viewpoint and perspective about sin is very different from our own. We can most often quickly excuse ourselves for the things we do. “Situational ethics” guide most all of our behaviors, and we very quickly excuse ourselves for our behaviors because we were caught in some particular situation.

But not so with God! With God, sin is more awful than we can imagine, completely and absolutely unacceptable in any form. It cannot continue to remain within us. It must be paid for and wiped away to the uttermost, just as if it had never taken place.

And “repentance” is our part in that equation. Our response of repentance gives the blood of Christ the opportunity to complete its work in washing away our sins. Through our repentance and the blood of Christ, we are made Holy.

That is why there is such rejoicing in heaven as we repent.

As we close, may I take just a few moments and lead us through some thoughts in prayer, thoughts that might bring one or more of us to truly repent for some of our sins.

Perhaps you might have a deeply held bitterness or contempt within your soul, or perhaps you have committed some other wretched sin that you would like to ask God to forgive.

Or perhaps you are, right now, caught up in and entangled within some sinful circumstance and you need the Lord Jesus to come and to rescue you out of it.

Pray with me for a while!

Oh dear Father, thank you for being my Savior and for being the loving Shepherd who watches over me. But Dear Father, You know my heart so very well. You know that I am often like that foolish lamb that has wandered off and gotten lost. And even worse, sometimes I am that sheep that has intentionally chosen to go places that I should not go. And when I do that, I find that I get involved in things that I know you would not approve of. And I get ashamed and want to hide. Too often, I know how Adam and Eve felt as they tried to hide from you and tried to cover their sin.

And oh dear Father, it is so easy to get entangled in the sinful brambles all around me, behaviors and relationships that I should never even get near. But I'm there and though I'm hiding, Lord Jesus, I still want you to hear my cry and come and find me.

Father, I confess that for most of my life I very mistakenly thought that I could hide my sins from you. I believe that I hide them well from other people, my friends, my family. But now Father, I realize that I can't hide anything from you.

Your word tells me clearly that you know every thought that I am thinking, that before a word ever comes to my tongue, you know it already.

So, Father, I repent and I want you to help me, beginning with my thoughts. I confess to you that I have wrong thoughts that flow through my mind so very often, angry thoughts, bitter thoughts, vulgar thoughts, judgmental thoughts, and on and on. And I know that you don't want me to think those thoughts, that my thoughts often spill out into wrong behaviors where I say and do things that are wrong and sinful, saying and doing things that hurt other people, often hurting the dear ones that I love the most. And I know that I can't unsay or undo those awful and wrong things, so please, please help me to not say them or do them.

And Father, I confess that I let my eyes violate your Holy boundaries. I watch wrong movies and programs, programs that are vulgar and profane. And I watch programs that feed my anger about our society, the political wranglings that constantly provoke my judgmental thinking. And I even go so far as to excuse myself for doing those things. And I know that I can't excuse my behaviors. Only you can do that!

Father, I especially want to repent of my habit of too quickly making my own decisions about matters before I come to you to ask your guidance and direction. Too often, I act as if you don't have a say in the things I'm doing. But you do. You do! You are sovereign and you are involved in even the smallest matters of my life. Help me dear Father to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and especially slow to anger, because I know that my anger can never accomplish your loving will.

And Father, I also have loved ones who have wandered away from your watchcare. They got caught up in the entanglements of this world, the briars and the brambles and the bushes of earthly concerns. And they seem not to even know that they are in a bad place and they don't seem to even know that they once had a better life while living within your flock in your pleasant pastures. And they seem to not know that you are looking for them and that you want to help them. Oh Dear Father open their ears so that they can hear your voice calling to them.

Father, I'll go for now, but I'll be back in a few minutes to talk to you more. I really do need you every hour. But for now, thank you for loving me and thank you for saving my wretched soul. And thank you for always being my Faithful Shepherd. I pray all these things in your blessed Name Lord Jesus. Amen!

