

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Outline

- A. Luke told about another complaint of the Pharisees and scribes (1-2).
 - 1. The complaint was made when publicans and sinners were being attracted to Jesus in large numbers (1).
 - 2. The Pharisees and scribes muttered their grumbling complaint: "This one is welcoming sinners and is eating with them" (2).
- B. He told how Jesus answered their complaint with three parables about the lost (3-32).
 - 1. The parable of the Lost Sheep (3-7).
 - a) Jesus' question in answer to their complaint: What man who has a hundred sheep, if one of them gets lost, would not leave the ninety-nine and go after the lost one until he finds it?
 - b) What would he do when he finds the sheep? He would call his friends to rejoice with him, saying, "I have found my sheep that was lost."
 - c) The lesson applied: There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over the ninety-nine
 - 2. The parable of the Lost Coin (8-10).
 - a) Jesus' question: What woman who has ten pieces of silver wouldn't, if she loses one, search the house until she finds it?
 - b) What would she do when she finds it? She would call her neighbors and say, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece that was lost."
 - c) The lesson applied again: There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over ninety-nine persons who need no repentance.
 - 3. The parable of the Lost Son (11-32). In this parable Jesus gave detailed answers to all the problems involved in the complaint that He was receiving and associating with sinners.
 - a) The story of the prodigal son (11-20a).
 - (1) A man had two sons; the younger demanded his inheritance which the father gave to him.
 - (2) Soon the young man took all he had and went into a far country and wasted it in riotous living.

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- (3) After he had spent all his fortune, a famine occurred in the land; so he took a job herding swine.
 - (4) He became so destitute that he actually ate what the swine ate, but no man gave him a thing!
 - (5) When he came to his senses, he said, "How many servants in my father's house have food in abundance, and I am perishing in hunger!"
 - (6) He resolved to go back to his father and say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven in your sight; I am not worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants."
 - (7) The lost son followed out his resolution and went to his father.
- b) The wonderful welcome the lost son received from his father (20b-24).
- (1) The father saw him coming from afar; he was deeply moved and, running to meet him, embraced him and kissed him.
 - (2) The son acknowledged his sin before his father; he said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven in your sight; I am not worthy to be called your son."
 - (3) But Jesus said that the father ordered the servants to bring a robe and put it on him and a ring and put it on his finger and put shoes on his feet. He ordered them to kill the fatted calf and prepare a feast so that all of them might eat and make merry.
 - (4) He also told how the father revealed his very heart when he said, "This my son was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found."
 - (5) They began to make merry!
- c) The murmuring complaint of the older brother (25-32).
- (1) As he neared the house, he heard music and dancing and asked, "What's the meaning of this?"
 - (2) They told him that his lost brother had returned, and that his father had welcomed him with the feast because he had received him safe and sound.
 - (3) The older brother got angry and wouldn't come into the house even though the father urged him to do so.

- (4) His bitter complaint:
- (a) I served you all these years and never disobeyed a command of yours.
 - (b) You never gave me anything that I might make merry with my friends.
 - (c) But when this son of yours who devoured your living with harlots comes home, you kill the fatted calf for him!
- (5) The father's answer. This is Jesus' answer to the complaint of the Pharisees that he was receiving sinners.
- (a) "Son, you have been with me always, and all that is mine is yours too."
 - (b) "But it is right to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead and is alive; he was lost and is found!"

Christ Receives Sinful Men

Scripture

15:1-2 Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him to hear him. 2 And both the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

Comments

all the publicans and sinners.—Jesus had just been talking about the cost of discipleship and the demands which He was making on those who would be His followers. But the crowds of publicans and sinners—social outcasts who were looked upon with contempt by the Pharisees—continued to draw near to hear Him teach. It seems that the high standard of discipleship served to attract those who really knew what it meant to need the Savior. The challenge of the cross will draw men to Christ where a diluted "gospel" of ease will fail.

The Pharisees were always ready to seize upon these occasions to condemn Jesus. They were eager to make it appear that He was a "friend of sinners" when, as a matter of fact, He is *the* Friend of sinners.

Tax-collectors were generally looked upon as guilty of abusing their office and, of course, were classed as sinners.

murmured.—Jesus had on a few occasions been invited to have dinner with Pharisees, but when He ate with publicans and sinners these same Pharisees were quick to condemn Him. They tried to make it appear that He was a sinner too—guilt by association.

This same Satanic scheme is seen in various places in the ministry of Christ and His apostles. The Pharisees had tried to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people by saying that He was casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub. Paul and Silas faced the possibility of having their work ruined because of the demon-possessed person who followed them at Philippi (Acts 16:16-18).

receives sinners.—Jesus had made it clear that He had come to seek and save sinners—not any kind of sinners, but those who repented. He required His followers to renounce all and take up their cross and follow Him daily. Pharisees, of course, felt that they needed no repentance.

In answering the charge of the Pharisees, Jesus takes them at their own estimate of themselves and still shows that they were wrong in condemning Him for His attitude toward sinners. In the three parables that follow, He more than justifies His position.

Parable of the Lost Sheep

Scripture

15:3-7 And he spake unto them this parable, saying, 4 What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? 5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and his neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. 7 I say unto you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, who need no repentance.

Comments

this parable.—Jesus used three parables or illustrations to answer the complaint of the Pharisees. They were three devastating blows at their false position. In them, Jesus more than justified His action in receiving sinners and eating with them, for His mission was to seek and save the lost.

The church, as the body of Christ, has the same mission. Evangelism is the first business of the church. But one wonders if the church has lost sight of its purpose in the world. Social reform—and there is need for so much work in this area—is not the first business of the church. Only the gospel can transform the hearts of men (Rom. 12:1-2). When that happens, he can transform the society in which he lives. The leaven of the gospel must be hidden in the heart before an effective transformation of society can be expected. It is the gospel that saves from sin, and it is sin that is causing all the trouble in the world today.

It is not the task of the church to take over the responsibility of the home and relieve parents of their duty to train the child in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. But many parents expect some faithful Bible school teacher to give their children all the religious training they will ever get; they seldom stop to thank the teacher for this work of love.

Much that is done in youth programs today merely serves to relieve parents from a responsibility that is theirs. Many parents never open their homes for youth meetings or provide transportation for groups of young people or funds for the necessary expense of the work. Yet these same people are quick to complain if "the church" fails to meet the problems of youth. Of course, parents who are active workers in the church will find that the association with other Christian parents helps immensely in the task of guiding young people in this evil day.

In many instances, the church faces the real danger of leaving its first love—love for Christ—by failing to do its first work which is the work of preaching the gospel to save sinners.

It is the responsibility of the church to uphold the standards of conduct that meet the approval of God. In no place is this more true than in upholding the Biblical standard for the Christian home. *one of them lost.*—This is the point of the parable. Jesus was justifying His effort to save the lost sinner. No one could argue that it was wrong to look for the sheep that was lost, and it took only little effort to apply this principle to the sinner who was certainly lost.

The sheep that got lost may have wandered off from the rest of the flock; perhaps it was still young and had not learned the dangers that beset its path. The case is different with men. Some are lost because they do not have the kind of home that God intended all

children to have. Children from broken homes or from homes where Christ and His Word are not honored have little chance to escape from the alluring appeals of sin today.

the ninety and nine.—The ninety-nine represent the Pharisees who felt that they were righteous and needed no repentance. The nine coins that were not lost and the elder brother who "never disobeyed a command" of his father also represent what the Pharisees thought they were. Jesus didn't argue this point with them. He was justifying His effort on behalf of those who knew they were sinners and needed His help.

Rejoice with me.—If the Pharisees had really needed no repentance they would have rejoiced when the sinner was saved. Heaven did; why didn't they?

need no repentance.—Repentance is the decision to forsake sin and live the kind of life that is acceptable in the sight of God. Both John and Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom that called on sinners to repent and produce the fruit of righteousness. Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. Of course, the Pharisees needed repentance just as much as any other sinner, but they were unaware of it. The case of the elder brother shows this to be true.

Parable of the Lost Coin

Scripture

15:8-10 Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find it? 9 And when she hath found it, she calleth together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. 10 Even so, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Comments

ten pieces of silver.—Much has been said about what these represent. The tendency to treat the illustration as an allegory may cause one to lose sight of the real lesson. The parable simply says that the woman had ten pieces and lost one. What woman would not search diligently until she found the lost coin? So Jesus again justified His effort to find the lost sinner.

There is nothing to suggest that this parable teaches anything

different from that which is taught by the parable of the Lost Sheep, for the lost sheep and the lost coin represent the lost sinner.

Without reading too much into the stories, it is possible to see that the sheep got itself lost while the woman lost the coin. Was it through carelessness, or neglect, or irresponsibility? These parables are not about sheep and coins, but people! People are lost sometimes by neglect or indifference or carelessness on the part of others who should show some concern for their fellowmen. Who cares about the drop-out? In some Bible classes, one has to attend three times to become "a member." But he can be absent indefinitely without having anyone bother to find out why. Who speaks to the lonely stranger at church? Are some lost because no one has time to show them that the Savior cares?

joy in the presence of the angels of God.—If angels rejoice over the sinners who repent, why condemn Jesus for His effort to save them? The contrast is so great that we wonder if the Pharisees were beginning to regret the unfortunate position they had taken?

The Parable of the Lost Son

Scripture

15:11-32 And he said, A certain man had two sons: 12 and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. 13 And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country; and there he wasted his substance with riotous living. 14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that country; and he began to be in want. 15 And he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. 17 But when he came to himself he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight: 19 I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. 20 And he arose, and came to his father. But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. 21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned

against heaven, and in thy sight: I am no more worthy to be called thy son. 22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23 and bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and make merry: 24 for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. 25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called to him one of the servants, and inquired what these things might be. 27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. 28 But he was angry, and would not go in: and his father came out, and entreated him. 29 But he answered and said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, and I never transgressed a commandment of thine; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: 30 but when this thy son came, who hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou killedst for him the fatted calf. 31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine. 32 But it was meet to make merry and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Comments

A certain man had two sons.—Note the progress of thought in the three parables: a lost sheep, a lost coin, a lost son. The sheep got lost; someone lost the coin; but the son was an intelligent human being created in the image of God with the ability to think and decide his course of action. He deliberately left his father's house and wasted his life in riotous living.

to feed swine.—The wastefulness of sin led to degradation in sin. Jews were proud shepherds of sheep. They loved David, their shepherd king. Jesus called Himself the Good Shepherd. But for a Jew to become a swineherd was to sink to the lowest possible state of disgrace. Swine, according to the Law of Moses, were unclean. But this destitute son who was really lost actually ate with the swine.

no man gave to him.—He had friends while his money lasted, but none when it was gone. Those who lead others to sin usually abandon them when they are of no further use to them. This should be

a strong warning to those who run with the crowd that cares nothing for God or Christ or the Bible.

But when he came to himself.—When he realized that he was needlessly wasting his life, he resolved to do something about it. Repentance is mentioned in each of the parables, but in this one Jesus shows what it means to repent. It arose out of the awareness of the sinful, lost, and utterly hopeless state of the son who had wasted his life. It is the resolution to do something about the situation. It is inspired by the memory of home and all that it meant to be a son. It is accompanied by a sense of genuine humility that recognized that the right to be called "son" had been forfeited. It was a sense of appreciation of the privilege of becoming a servant in the father's household. It is the decision of the lost son who said, "I will arise and go to my father."

Sinners do have a responsibility for their condition and can do something about it; they can follow the instruction of the Word of God and go back to the Heavenly Father through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who died that their sins might be blotted out. Repentance is accompanied by confession to the father of the sin committed against heaven in the father's sight. Few people have the courage to make such an acknowledgement before God. Too many are like the Pharisee who "needed no repentance." Such are not saved from their sins; they merely "join" the church! They are not really hungry for the "bread in the father's house." They act as if they were doing God a favor by casting their influence with His church. Phariseeism is present in so many places today!

And he arose and came to his father.—The prodigal had left his father's house by his own free choice; he was returning as a result of the decision he had made to go to his father and home. Those who teach that we are born with a tendency to sin fail to see that it was absolutely unnecessary for him to have left in the first place. Neither was it necessary to waste his inheritance. James plainly says that "each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lust and enticed" (James 1:14). His own lust is his desire for that which is evil. God did make man with the ability to choose between the heavenly home and the alluring thing that Satan offers, but He did not make man incapable of resisting the devil. James says, "resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7). Being made in the image of God, man is capable of deciding whether he will please God or Satan—it is just that simple. The prodigal went into sin by

his own deliberate act; he returned to the father by his own deliberate choice, because he wanted to escape the intolerable state of sin. *But while he was yet afar off.*—The father didn't wait until he came knocking at the door; he saw him afar off and ran to meet him.

God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself (II Cor. 5:19). He came from heaven to Calvary to meet the sinner who had the courage to start toward heaven. The starting point was the decision to get up and go to the father.

moved with compassion.—God's love and pity for a lost son is shown in the father's attitude toward his son who had the courage to want to get out of his sad state. This is Jesus' answer to those who were criticizing Him for receiving sinners.

And the son said unto him, Father.—Only part of the words of verses 18-19 are restated here. According to the footnote, the son repeated the confession as he planned it. Some may ask, "Did the father interrupt the son's confession?" It is impossible to tell from the text. The son planned the confession. For the son's sake, the father probably heard him out. After all, it was brief, but very necessary. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9). One of the hardest things we may be called on to do is to admit that we have sinned, but the prodigal said to his father, "I have sinned." The Pharisee, of course, according to his own opinion of himself, didn't need to make such a confession. He was one of the ninety-nine that didn't need to repent. But John says that if we say that we have not sinned, we make God a liar and His word is not in us (I John 1:10).

Bring forth the robe.—There is nothing in the father's action that indicates that anything less than full restoration of the lost son had ever entered his mind. It reveals the true story of the grace and mercy of the Heavenly Father. The sinner who repents and gets himself baptized into Christ, washing away his sins in the blood of the Lamb, becomes a member of the family of God with all the rights and privileges of a child of God.

"As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us" (Psa. 103:12). He has said through the inspired apostle, "Repent and turn again that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). He has promised in the Word, "Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more forever" (Heb. 8:12). How wonderful is the grace of our Heavenly Father!

To be effective in the proclamation of the gospel, the church must return to the high standard of Christian living that meets God's approval (Rom. 12:1-2). Too many try to live half in Egypt and half in the Promised Land. The Father has not required the impossible, for He has provided the armor with which to withstand the devil. With the shield of faith, the Christian can quench all the fiery darts of the evil one (Eph. 6:16).

let us eat and make merry.—The feasting and joy in the father's house is contrasted with the famine and sorrow of the life of sin.

for this my son was dead and is alive again.—Sin brings death (Rom. 6:23). Did the critical Pharisee now see why Jesus was receiving sinners? He had reached the climax of His argument; with the finding of the lost son there was cause for real rejoicing by all.

Now his elder son.—The elder son presents a clear picture of the Pharisee's estimate of himself; he was like one of the ninety-nine that didn't need to repent. But he was angry that the father had received his lost son back into the family.

I never transgressed a commandment of thine.—If there had been any doubt that Jesus had the Pharisees in mind when He spoke of the ninety-nine, the nine, and the elder brother, this should remove it. The elder brother reacted exactly as the Pharisees had done.

The claim of the elder brother is remarkable to say the least. But the father didn't stop to argue the point with him; he accepted it at face value, but argued that it was appropriate to welcome his lost son who had returned.

this thy brother was dead.—The elder son in his anger had disowned his younger brother, just as the Pharisees had disowned the publican and sinner. With contempt, he said to his father, "This son of yours" devoured your living. He spoke as if he were in no way related to him. But the father, correcting this attitude, said, "This brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

A more devastating answer to the position of the Pharisee could hardly be imagined. Only hearts that were completely hardened could fail to respond to the logic and love of Jesus' defense of His mission of seeking and saving the lost.

Sinners are dead through their trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). Christ shed His blood that their sins might be blotted out and that they might be made alive together with Him and sit with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:4-10).

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Summary

Perhaps there is no place in the whole Bible where the saving grace of God is more clearly presented than in this chapter devoted to the three parables of grace. Christ defended His mission against the hypocritical charge of the Pharisees with a logic and love that could not be answered by His critics. It is true that they were not converted, but sinners of all ages since then have been grateful for His clear explanation of God's grace which He made available by His death on the cross.

Sinners are lost as the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son clearly show. The story of the lost son shows what it means to repent, for he decided to get up and go to his father. The once arrogant lad came back in genuine humility; he only asked to be made as one of his father's hired servants.

A welcome awaits the lost when they return to the Heavenly Father's house. Heaven rejoices over one sinner who repents. The rejoicing over finding the lost sheep and the lost coin indicate it, but the feast of joy in the father's house when his son returned shows what it means to God. It was certainly appropriate to rejoice and make merry for the brother was dead, but was alive; he was lost, but found!

Questions

1. What was the occasion for the Pharisees' complaint against Jesus?
2. What was their object in making the complaint?
3. How did Jesus answer the complaint?
4. In the parable of the Lost Sheep, who were represented by the ninety-nine?
5. Did the Pharisees need to repent?
6. Why didn't Jesus attack their sinful lives at this time?
7. Why did He tell about the shepherd who went to find the lost sheep?
8. Why did He tell about the rejoicing when the sheep was found?
9. Over what sinners does heaven rejoice?
10. What kind of sinners does Jesus receive? Where did this leave the Pharisees, in reality?
11. In considering the whole chapter, why can we say that the

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- "ninety and nine who need no repentance" represent the Pharisees?
12. What does the story of the lost sheep show about people who are lost?
 13. What is the purpose of the parable of the Lost Coin?
 14. What do these parables suggest about the first business of the church?
 15. What is the relation of preaching to social reform?
 16. Should the church take over the responsibility for teaching children? What about parental responsibility?
 17. What responsibility does the church have in regard to standards for the home?
 18. What is a possible distinction between the fact that a sheep was lost and a coin was lost?
 19. What should be the concern of church leaders for those who drop out of Bible school or church?
 20. What attitudes of church people may cause others to be lost?
 21. Why mention the rejoicing among the angels?
 22. What makes the case of the lost son different from that of the lost sheep or lost coin?
 23. How did Jesus picture the degradation and waste of sin?
 24. What was the attitude of Jews toward swine? What bearing on the job the prodigal took?
 25. What became of the prodigal's friends when his money was gone?
 26. What caused him to think of his father's house?
 27. How does his story illustrate the meaning of repentance?
 28. What does James say about the cause of sin?
 29. What does the father's attitude toward the returning son teach about God's attitude toward sinners who repent?
 30. How far did the Heavenly Father go in order to meet the sinner?
 31. What does the parable of the Lost Son show about the necessity of confessing sins to the Father?
 32. What did the father do for his son upon his return to the home?
 33. What does this teach about God's treatment of sinners who repent?
 34. What do the Scriptures say about the removal of our sins?
 35. What kind of standard must the church uphold in the matter

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of living if it is to be effective in proclaiming the gospel to the lost?

36. How did the father describe the fact that the son had returned?
37. Who is represented by the elder brother?
38. What about his claim that he had never transgressed a commandment of his father's?
39. Why didn't the father argue the point with him?
40. What did he call the lost brother?
41. How did the father correct this view?
42. How did he appeal to the elder son to accept his own brother?