Lesson 9, March 16

REPENT & REJOICE

Luke 15:1-32

Introduction

Luke 15 continues the Sabbath dinner party begun in chapter 14. A guest at a Pharisee-ruler's table, Jesus criticizes the religious leaders' piety. While they enjoyed flaunting their spirituality in front of each other, the outcasts of society were longing for true spiritual help. At the end of **Luke 14**, Jesus makes clear that only those who are willing to give up their life—family, position, and possessions—are qualified as His disciples. While obvious sinners draw closer to Christ, the religious leaders scoff. But Jesus patiently responds with three illustrations of this point: **it's right to rejoice when sinners repent!**

What types of thoughts flood your mind when you've lost something important? _____

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Heaven rejoices when sinners are found (Luke 15:1-10)

1. What is surprising about the people who draw near to Jesus and the people who criticize Jesus after He says that disciples must be willing to forsake all they have? (Luke 15:1-2) _____

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> *Most people would never guess that the publicans and sinners would want to hear what Jesus was saying. The publicans loved money more than their fellow-Jews, and they were willing to work as tax collectors for the Roman government, often charging extra to keep for themselves. On the other hand, the Pharisees regularly studied and taught the Old Testament for the common people, and the scribes copied the Old Testament onto new scrolls. Yet it was these who knew God's Word better than anyone who murmured against Jesus.*

2. In Jesus' culture, what would any shepherd of one hundred sheep do if one of them were lost? (Luke 15:3-6) _____

> *It is ironic that in chapter 14, Jesus asks the multitudes which of them doesn't count the cost when he builds a tower. For the most part, the common people of that time would never dream of building their own tower—large building projects were reserved for rulers and nobility. In the same way, here Jesus asks the well-to-do scribes and Pharisees which of them wouldn't leave his flock to find his lost sheep. No self-respecting religious leader would be caught doing the low job of watching sheep!*

3. Jesus' point of the parable of the one lost sheep is that joy shall be in heaven over *one sinner that repenteth*, more than over *ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance* (Luke 15:7)

> *This parable of the lost sheep uses the same imagery as the one in Matthew 18, but Jesus' point is different. In Matthew 18, the lost sheep represents someone who is already a follower of Christ. Accordingly, in Matthew, the word "lost" means gone astray. In Luke, however, the lost sheep is sinner who has not yet followed Christ, and the word "lost" means vanished. Later, the same word is used to describe someone who has died (see Luke 15:17).*

4. In Jesus' culture, what would any woman who had ten pieces of silver do if she lost one in the evening? (Luke 15:8-9) _____

5. Jesus' point of the parable of the one lost silver piece is that there is *joy in the presence of the angels of God* over one sinner that repenteth
(Luke 15:10)

6. What are a couple ways that we disciples of Jesus can search diligently for lost, unsaved people? _____

Disciples rejoice when sinners return (Luke 15:11-32)

1. What does the father do when his younger son demands his inheritance? (Luke 15:11-12) _____

> *Jesus describes an unlikely situation to picture God's relationship with sinners. The Jews considered dividing up one's property before dying to be foolish: "To son or wife, to brother or friend, give no power over yourself while you live; and give not your goods to another so as to ask for them again" (Sirach 33:19-23). But in this story, the unconventional father's decision to give his sons his estate pictures God giving humanity free will: the choice to sin or obey Him.*

2. Gathering his newfound wealth, the younger son takes his journey into *a far country*, and there *wastes his substance with riotous living* (Luke 15:13)

> *The word prodigal means "wasteful" or "extravagant." He liquidated his assets, moved as far away as he could, and used up all his resources on a wild lifestyle. No other details are given—none are needed.*

3. Why does the son "fain" or long to eat the husky pig food? (Luke 15:14-16) _____

> *Notice that Jesus says, "No man gave unto him." Though sinners seek satisfaction from a myriad of sources, nothing can meet the basic needs of their heart—except God, the Father that they reject (Romans 1:18-23).*

4. Once he comes to himself, what plan does the son settle on doing? (Luke 15:17-19) _____

5. While the son was still a great way off, his father "saw him, and *had compassion*, and *ran*, and fell on his neck, and *kissed him*" (Luke 15:20)

> *The father would have had to been waiting and watching for his son's return to see him "a great way off." Further, no self-respecting nobleman would ever run, but this unconventional father cares so much more for his child than what his neighbors thought. In fact, he would call his neighbors to celebrate his son's return soon afterward (Luke 15:23-24; compare with 15:6 and 15:9). As a side note, the father's watchfulness parallels the type of watchfulness that we Christians should have for Jesus' return (see Luke 12:37).*

6. Before the son even finishes his prepared speech, what does the father tell the servants? (Luke 15:22-24) _____

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> *Certainly, the son was correct in saying that he was no more worthy to be called a son; yet in his compassion, the father exalts his son. The son is worthy because the father says he is. When a person is saved, he or she is made "acceptable in the Beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). The sinner is restored to God—he who was an outcast is now a family member.*

7. What thoughts do you think were running through the elder brother's mind when he found out about his father's celebration? (Luke 15:25-30) _____

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> *The elder brother seems to miss the point of everything. First, as a son, his relationship to His father wasn't about "serving" or "not transgressing his commandment"—it was about spending time together and showing love to each other. The younger son seems to understand this (Luke 15:19; see Jesus' words in John 15:15). Second, the party for the younger brother isn't a celebration of his sin but of his repentance. The younger son is not making merry with his foreign friends but with his father.*

8. What does the elder brother's anger reveal about his character? (Luke 15:29-30) _____

> *I'm inclined to think that the elder brother cared about money more than anything else—including his father and his brother. His biggest complaint is not that his brother was sinful but that he devoured his father's living. He, on the other hand, continued to run the family farm, providing even the fatted calf that was slaughtered. It so upsets him that he only refers to his brother to his father as "this thy son." Though he may not have externally transgressed his father's commands, he reveals that in his heart he cares about money just as much as his brother did. He is also lost and in need of repentance.*

> Here is one of the parable's great ironies, made graphic by Jesus' use of literary space. The brother who had been on the outside is now on the inside, while the brother who had been on the inside is now on the outside. Again Jesus' words echo, "The last has become first, and the first has become last."
> - Darrell L. Bock

9. Why was it "meet" or fitting to celebrate the return of the younger brother? (Luke 15:31-32)_____

> *Notice that the father patiently reminds his elder son that the prodigal is his brother. If the father cared most about the lost money, the tarnished reputation, or the wasted years, then he would not be celebrating the return of the younger brother. But the father cares for the life of his son, and therefore the only fitting response for his return is to rejoice! Remember, the older son had also been given his inheritance (see Luke 15:12), so everything the father had was his as well.*

Conclusion

And so the Sabbath Day meal that began with the healing of a disfigured man (**Luke 14:4**) concludes with the raising of a dead man (**Luke 15:32**). The meal of mercy (**Luke 14:13-14**) becomes a meal of merriment (**Luke**

15:32). Repentance and rejoicing run freely together around the table of God. And all His guests find mercy in His forgiveness.

What thoughts went through your mind when you repented of your sin and believed on Jesus? _____

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What are some creative ways that we can celebrate when sinners repent?

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For Dr. Luke, the parables of the lost sheep, the lost silver piece, and the lost son further clarified Jesus' purpose to Theophilus. Theophilus may have doubted Jesus because He didn't use His power to set up His Millennial Kingdom, but this chapter shows that Jesus came for another reason. Jesus was seeking lost sinners. He was calling them to repentance. He was filling His Kingdom up with restored citizens.

Can you think of any people that Christians might not draw near to, even though they need the good news too? _____

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Why is it important that Christians join the Father in searching for lost sinners? _____

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