

Sermon Outline - Session 2

The People Around Jesus



Text: Luke 15:1-10 NIV

Alternate Title: He Welcomes Sinners

Introduction: Luke 15 begins with the religious leaders noticing something—that Jesus seems to attract and befriend “tax collectors and sinners,” moral outcasts of respectable society. We read in verse 2 that they “mutter” to one another about this. We can almost imagine them saying: “He welcomes sinners! This kind of person never comes to *our* meetings. This must be because he is telling them what they want to hear. He is not calling them to repent or change.” In response, Jesus tells them three parables. By listening carefully to all three parables, and especially to the last one, traditionally called *The Parable of the Prodigal Son*, Jesus challenges his listeners’ fundamental assumptions about God, sin, and salvation. He gives them an entirely new way of thinking about God, themselves, and the whole world. This week we look at the first two of these parables. Let’s notice three sets of characters: 1) the unwilling listeners, 2) the lost things, and 3) the joyful seekers.

1. The unwilling listeners—verses 1-3.

- There are two groups of people around Jesus—“tax collectors and ‘sinners,’” and “Pharisees and the teachers of the law.”
- The religious group is especially offended that Jesus eats with sinners. Table fellowship was considered a sign of acceptance and friendship. How, they thought, can he be so open to them? Doesn’t he realize that they are the “bad people”— who are the real trouble with the world? (And, therefore, that we are the “good guys”?)
- Jesus does not give a direct, compact answer. Instead, he responds with three stories or parables. It is important to realize that these parables were not spoken in a vacuum. The purpose of all three parables was to challenge the Pharisees’ point of view.
- When we get to the final parable, we will realize that both groups of people—“sinners” and “religious people”—are actually in the parable. That is why the last story, the story of the prodigal son, is Jesus’ final answer. But that is to come later. For now, let’s notice how he begins to challenge the Pharisees’ attitude and categories of thought in the first two stories.

2. The lost things—verses 4-5, 8.

First, Jesus confronts their categories about sin.

- In the parable of the lost sheep, the shepherd goes out to find the sheep. A sheep is a stupid animal that is completely helpless when lost. In the second parable the lost object is a coin, even more incapable of finding its way home.

- The three lost “objects”—the sheep, the coin, and (in vv. 11-32) the son—all represent people who are spiritually lost, far from God. This is Jesus characterizing the people the Pharisees view as “sinners.” They are lost, yet they are lost in quite different ways. The sheep is lost through foolishness, the coin through thoughtlessness, and the son through willfulness.
- Taken together, this is a nuanced, multi-dimensional view of sin.
- Here’s an example. Mr. Smith has a problem with abusive anger—he often flies off the handle and is verbally abusive and sometimes physically so. Why?
 - Is his problem genetic? Is it a matter of brain chemistry? Is it just part of his inborn nature, as in the example of the sheep?
 - Or is his problem the result of a bad environment? Perhaps the result of poor parenting and family life? Was he, like the coin, mismanaged by his “supervisors”?
 - Or does his problem stem from selfishness and pride, as with the prodigal son?
 The answer is that usually, in varying degrees, it is all of the above.
- Sin is deeply complex. It is inborn in you, it is magnified by sinful treatment, and it is deepened and shaped by your own choices. Jesus’ view of sin is more comprehensive and multi-dimensional than that of many psychologists, sociologists, and many religious leaders. It is certainly more comprehensive than the view held by the Pharisees listening to him.

3. The joyful seekers—verses 6-7, 9-10.

Second, Jesus confronts their categories about salvation.

- Most people think of religion as “humanity’s search for God.” We like to think of ourselves as spiritual seekers, as honest inquirers. We look at the religions of the world and, while giving somewhat different directions about *how* to do so, they all seem to agree that if we sincerely search for God we will find him. Millions of people the world over believe that by believing and obeying God’s law in the Bible, they can find God.
- The problem is that anyone who feels they have searched for and found God will naturally disdain those who seem to be making no effort at all. They will look at “sinners” and say, “I found God! If you try, you can. I did.”
- But the Biblical gospel turns this idea on its head. The shepherd (whom Jesus obviously identifies with) must go out to seek and to save that which is lost (Luke 19:10). Likewise the coin cannot search and find its owner, the owner finds the coin.
- And here is the first great blow to the world’s categories. Every other religion says that we can search for and find God if we try hard enough. Only Christianity says, no, God had to come down into the world to seek and save us. Salvation must be by his grace, not our achievement.
- The end of each parable challenges not just the categories of the Pharisees but their heart and attitude. A theme through all three parables is the joy of finding the lost. God does not look at spiritually lost people the way the Pharisees do. Because the Pharisees do not see themselves as lost sinners saved by grace, they disdain “sinners”. They feel superior to them. But heaven rejoices when “sinners” are reached and found.
- Jesus is the Great Shepherd, even more intent and joyful than the shepherd of the parable. For Jesus knew that he would have to die to bring the lost home, but “for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame” (Heb. 12:2). The joy he had in doing his Father’s will, and the joy he had in finding us, was so great that he was willing to endure the cross.

Good source books:

Bailey, Kenneth. *Finding the Lost Cultural Keys to Luke 15*. Concordia, 1992.

Bock, Darrell L. *Luke 9:51-24:53*. Baker, 1994.

Ellis, E.Earle. *The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Luke*. Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1974.

Wilcock, Michael. *The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Luke*. IVP, 1979.

Sessions:

Session	Sermon	Book Chapters	DVD	Group Study
ONE - The Parable			Film	✓
TWO - The People Around Jesus	✓	Introduction and Chapter 1	Session Two Clip	✓
THREE - The Two Lost Sons	✓	Chapters 2 and 3	Session Three Clip	✓
FOUR - The Elder Brother	✓	Chapter 4	Session Four Clip	✓
FIVE - The True Elder Brother	✓	Chapter 5	Session Five Clip	✓
SIX - The Feast of the Father	✓	Chapters 6 and 7	Session Six Clip	✓