



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 6 Issue 37

September 30, 2007

The Parables of the Lost Sheep and Coin

Years ago in what eventually would become Assyria, God spoke to a man named Abram.

Genesis 12:1-3, “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”

Now this election of Abram out of all the families of the earth not surprisingly would become the source of stumbling for Abram's descendants. After all, God specifically promised to bless the descendants of Abram, curse any and all who opposed them, and care for and protect Abram's seed, no wonder they thought that they were chosen because of something very special. And in time this thinking developed a mentality which led the Jew to look down upon other people. They believed that there was little if any hope for the Phoenician, Babylonian, or the Canaanite. In fact, not only was there little hope, they didn't want it any other way. One rabbi wrote that “God delights over the downfall of the godless”¹

Another rabbi said, “There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world.”²

¹ Compare t. Sanh. 14:10; SBII, 209

² LT2, Page 256.

And that is why in the eighth century B.C, when God told one of His prophets to preach to the very people from which Abraham came that prophet rebelled! He didn't want the Assyrians to find favor with God. He would rather see their blood strewn in the streets!

Imprecatory Prayers

Now though 2800 years separate us from Jonah the prophet, God's people really haven't changed. When I mention the following names, what is your first thought?

- Timothy McVeigh.
- Hillary Clinton.
- Nancy Pelosi.
- al Qaeda.
- Osama Bin Laden.

Whatever may have been your first thought, I doubt that “mission field” was one of them. For many in Evangelical Christianity, these people represent evil. And the thought of praying for their good and their prosperity is rarely considered.

Now that is not to say that the church isn't praying for these people. The only problem is that so many are praying NOT for their salvation BUT for their condemnation.

I'll never forget a couple of years ago. A prominent leader of the Pro-Life movement was soliciting prayer for the DEATH of certain judges and leaders who supported abortion-on-demand. They sent word to pro-abortion leaders that prayers were being offered for their death.

Sound a little familiar?

Wasn't that the sentiment of Jonah when it came to Nineveh?

Isn't that at times our sentiment when it comes to wicked and evil people?

What is God's view of the wicked living today? And what therefore must be our attitude toward them?

The parables at which we are looking address this very question. Throughout Christ's ministry, the “wicked” and “evil” of Palestine gathered around Christ, AND CHRIST RECEIVED THEM.³ Now Christ's reception of these “sinners” was understood on the part of the Pharisees and scribes as a testimony of the kind of man Christ must have been. The Pharisee’s criticized Christ.

Luke 15:2, “And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

In other words, the Pharisees were saying that Christ must be a sinner!

In response to the Pharisee’s accusation Christ told the parables at which we are looking. Notice God's assessment of the “sinner” whom the religious leaders of Christ's day had written off.

³ Compare Luke 15:1

The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:4, “**What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?**”

The mentioning of shepherding would have aroused vivid thoughts among the recipients of this parable. Not only was sheep herding a common Old Testament theme⁴ but the region in which Christ presented this parable was well-acquainted with shepherding (in and around Judea).

Now the average size flock of most shepherds in Christ's day would have numbered around 100 which tells us that Christ is not talking about a wealthy man. Thus the loss of one lamb would be noticed because poverty was a problem in Christ's day. Compared to the ancient Near East, there are very few in the United States who would be considered as poor. And thus, to lose just one sheep was a serious matter, and the people knew it.

Thus the shepherd began the search for the lost lamb.

Luke 15:4, “**What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?**”

In light of the poverty that was common in Christ's day, to leave ninety-nine sheep in a “safe” pasture in order to find one lost sheep before it was eaten or harmed was an acceptable and expected practice; it constituted good shepherding.

In fact, recall Christ's teaching on the Sabbath.⁵ The Sabbath though corrupted and misconstrued by the Pharisees and Sadducees, was a day ordained by God for the purpose of His people taking delight in Him.⁶ As such, it was/is a very serious thing for the child of God to neglect this important day.⁷ And yet, listen to the teaching of Christ regarding an activity that was acceptable on the Sabbath.

Matthew 12:11-12, “And he said unto them, What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.”

A lost sheep was so serious that to “break” the Sabbath for its rescue was perfectly acceptable: before the religious leaders of that day AND before God. And thus, the mentioning of a shepherd leaving his flock to search for a lost sheep would have been the expectation of those listening with regard to a faithful shepherd! And that is why we read of their rejoicing.

The Rejoicing

Luke 15:5, “And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”

Here the shepherd who finds the lost sheep places it on his shoulders in the typical Mid-Eastern fashion.

⁴ Compare Psalm 23; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:15

⁵ Compare Matthew 12:11

⁶ Compare Genesis 2:1-3; Deuteronomy 5:15

⁷ Compare Isaiah 58:13-14

Again, based on the incredible value placed on any livestock (not to mention sheep), this shepherd indeed would have “rejoiced” such that he would call his friends and neighbors.

Luke 15:6, “And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.”

This would have been a reasonable response in a shepherding community. Because the community was organized around and founded upon the covenant, the families of a particular town would have been very close. In fact, so much so that they all would have rejoiced with a neighbor who had been so blessed.

The Lost Coin

Luke 15:8, “**Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?**”

The coin mentioned here, the Greek drachma, was equivalent to the Roman denarius. This coin amounted to a day's wage for common labor.⁸ These coins were grouped together as a collection of ten. This has lead many to believe that this probably was the woman's dowry.

Now in light of the culture of Christ's day, the money this woman lost would have been worn on a chain around her neck/head, or, more likely, would have been placed in rag which would have been tied shut. As such, either the chain broke or the rag came untied, and a coin fell to the ground. This presented a serious problem.

The Search

Luke 15:8, “**Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?**”

Based on Christ's description here we note that this woman was quite poor; her house is that of the typical abode of the poorer classes in that day. It had a dirt floor and either no windows or very small ones. Therefore, once the coin had slipped out and fallen to the floor, it would have blended into the dirt and thus would not have been very easy to find.

Thus, in order to find this lost coin, a lamp would be needed. Furthermore, in order to find this rather small coin among the dust and dirt of her house, the best possible way would be to sweep the floor all the while listening to the sound of the coin's “clinking” when it was hit. And thus the woman searches for this very important coin.

The Rejoicing

Luke 15:9, “And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.”

As just mentioned, this woman obviously was poor. Thus, to find a lost coin-, most likely from her dowry, would have been cause for much rejoicing. And so, the woman, just like the shepherd, calls to her neighbors to rejoice with her over her blessed discovery.

⁸ Compare Matthew 20:2

The Significance of the Lost Sheep and Coin

Now all of this brings us to the significance of these parables. What is Christ teaching here?

To answer this question we need to examine verse 7, 10.

Luke 15:7, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

Luke 15:10, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."

Here we learn of the inestimable value of any man entering the kingdom of God. Far from being the "unsavable" sinners that the Pharisees made them out to be, the non-Christian on whom God had set His love was precious! And thus God seeks out the non-Christian and rejoices over their restoration, regardless of their background and sin.

And we need to rejoice over a non-Christian coming to the kingdom of God.

And yet, this is where it gets difficult. We don't mind sinners, just so long as their sin is acceptable to us, and/or "clean" in our minds. But, take what we would consider to be an enemy, and expect us to love them and personally seek for their salvation and you have gone beyond what we consider acceptable behavior. This would mean that we would require us to physically seek out the "dregs" of our society and would call on us to forgive and seek the benefit of someone who has violated us.

A universal sin of mankind is that we tend to love the loveable and reject the undesirable. Dr. Edersheim wrote this:

"the Jewish teaching concerning repentance was quite other than, nay, contrary to, that of Christ. Theirs was not a Gospel to the lost: they had nothing to say to sinners. They called upon them to 'do penitence,' and then Divine Mercy... would have its reward for the penitent."⁹

And this typically is how we ourselves think! In order for someone to be accepted before God they first must clean up their lives! And thus in order for us to accept someone they too must clean up their lives! Frederick Danker put it this way:

"Affluent Westerners smile at all this fuss, and the idea of a lost-and-found party over one mangy sheep or even a small coin seems utterly ridiculous. But that is just the point. Religious people expect God to be less concerned about lost sinners than they themselves are about some trivial possession. Values are completely perverted. God's most precious possession is humanity!"

"The church comes under rebuke in these stories. It is precisely in the church that arrogant loveless attitudes toward the fallen and the disenfranchised display themselves."¹⁰

⁹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Book II, page 253

¹⁰ Frederick Danker, *Jesus and the new age : a commentary on St. Luke's Gospel*, Philadelphia : Fortress Press, ©1988. ISBN:0800620453, page 274-275

Oh brothers and sisters! What a wretched and miserable attitude we so often sport. In theory we say “Let the nations come to the Lord” or “Lord, use me as a vessel to let others know about you!” But then God answers our prayer and we are confronted by our enemy, whoever that may be

- The Rapist?
- The Murderer?
- The Defrauder?
- The Criminal?
- The Co-worker?
- A Family Member?

and far from seeking their salvation, we long for their condemnation.

Should there be rejoicing over one coming to know the Lord even if that one is our enemy?

Based on the teaching of God's word, there **MUST BE!** Truly this is the exhortation of this text. We must view this world through the eyes and with the ears of God. T. W. Manson wrote this:

“The attitude of Jesus to publicans and sinners is not a mere humanitarian enthusiasm on His part: it is the manifestation of the will and purpose of God.”¹¹

Norval Geldenhuys said this:

“In no other religion in the whole world does one come to know God as the One who in His love seeks the lost person to save him through His grace.”¹²

Thus, if God rejoices over the salvation of any sinner, regardless of their background, so must we! If God does not take delight in the destruction of the wicked¹³ so mustn't we. If Christ would seek out the reputed “sinner” that they might hear the good news, so also must be our search. Listen to Christ's rebuke in the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:46-47, For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?”

Indeed, the love of the world is a love for one's own. Yet the standard in Scripture is a love even for the enemy! And yet as I said, so often loving our enemy and seeking their good in Christ is the last thing on our minds.

Why is that?

Christ actually answered that question in this text.

¹¹ Quoted by Johannes Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (New international commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans (1960), ASIN: B0007F21SM*

¹² Johannes Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke (New international commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans (1960), ASIN: B0007F21SM, page 403*

¹³ Compare Ezekiel 33:11

Luke 15:7, “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”

Who are these ninety-nine righteous persons?

Based on the context the answer is obvious. It was the self-righteous Scribe and Pharisee.¹⁴ They are the ones who condemned Christ for eating with “sinners” as if these religious leaders were without sin. They are the ones who considered themselves alone to be acceptable to God.¹⁵ And based on this we conclude that Christ's reference to the ninety-nine righteous ones is a reference to the ninety-nine SELF-RIGHTEOUS people. In fact, this passage could be rendered to read like this:

“I tell you that in the same way, there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine self-righteous persons who think that they do not need repentance.”¹⁶

Do you see the point?

To

- Behold an unkempt, uneducated, smelly individual and feel repulsed
- Loath a criminal and long for his condemnation
- Refuse to spend eternity with someone who has violated us.
- Rejoice at the downfall of a notorious sinner.

is to act as if your rebellion in which you daily contemplate thoughts about God so utterly beneath the dignity of His majesty and honor, is less of a sin than what our enemy is guilty of!

Let us take careful notice here. Our shallow love for the lost is NOT the result of the hideous nature of their sin BUT the result of too high a view of ourselves and arrogance and pride on our part! Don't forget the words of Christ, “he who is forgiven little, loves little” (Luke 7:47).

We need to see

- Ourselves as we really are- a totally depraved people saved by grace.
- Our sin is as hideous before God as is our enemy's.

And until we recognize this, Christ's teaching here will always be beyond us. And so, we must

- Long for the salvation of ALL men.
- Labor for the redemption of the sinner.
- Pray for the salvation of the one who has harmed us.
- **BE WILLING TO BE THE ANSWER TO OUR PRAYER FOR THE SALVATION OF THE LOST!**

¹⁴ Compare Luke 18:11

¹⁵ Compare Romans 2:19-21

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of this issue and a defense of the present interpretation, see Hendriksen's commentary on *Luke*, NTC, pages 745-747.

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and these notes can be found at [The Parable of the Lost Sheep and Coin](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on September 30, 2007. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church