

Lost and Found: Luke 15

The Setting of the Parable (vv.1-2)

In the last verse of Luke 14 the Lord Jesus appeals to the people saying: 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.' Luke 15.1 shows us that it was the publicans and sinners who had the ear to hear. They were the ones who were willing to listen to Him. They were the ones who **knew** they were lost and in desperate need of a Saviour!! Given their interest, the Lord Jesus 'received them unto Himself' (v.2). This was not to condone their standard of morality, but rather that He might seek and save that which was lost.

There were two types of 'publicans'. There were the principals (e.g. Zacchaeus) and their deputies (e.g. Levi). Tax collectors were despised because they had sold themselves to Rome and become rich at the expense of their fellow Jews. 'Sinners' were those who were openly known by their immoral behaviour. They were the outcasts of society and people of disrepute. The Pharisees would avoid these people at all costs. They would even gather their garments around them so as not to be defiled by the touch of these common sinners. To associate with them was contaminating. To **eat** with them was outrageous (v.2). As far as the Pharisees were concerned, this action of the Lord Jesus demonstrated that He could not be God. Their opinion was that God hated sinners and loved the righteous (i.e. them). They believed that God even delighted in the death of sinners. Consequently, the actions of the Lord Jesus were contrary to their concept of God. **BUT, their concept and perception of God was WRONG!** God longs for, and loves sinners. In fact God will go to the greatest lengths to ensure that lost sinners are found and saved. This is the theme and teaching of the parable of Luke 15. The Pharisees had a wrong perception of God and His character. Do we? Often we create and worship in our minds a god who is not the God of the Bible. Sometimes we think we can sin and it doesn't really matter, but the God of the Bible is holy. Sometimes we think we can walk the Christian pathway half-heartedly, but the God of the Bible demands total devotion.

The Structure of the Parable (v.3)

3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying... Note. This is **one** parable in **three** parts. In each part, that which is lost is found, resulting in great **joy**. There is joy in 'heaven' (v.7), joy in 'the presence of the angels of God' (v.10) and joy in the father's house (v.25). The parable was spoken unto 'them', which primarily refers to the Pharisees and Scribes. They are the 99 sheep, the nine pieces of silver and the elder son.

The parable is in three parts as it displays the threefold work of God in salvation.

- The **sheep** is in **danger** and restored to the Shepherd through **suffering** (the Son).
- The **silver** is in **darkness** and restored to the Woman through **striving** (the Spirit).
- The **son** is in **distress** and restored to the Father resulting in **singing** (the Father).

We must ever remember that our God is One God, but He exists in three distinct Persons: Father, Son and Spirit. All work together in unity and harmony of purpose. For example, the Godhead is seen participating together in the work of **creation** (Genesis 1.1-3, John 1.3, Ephesians 3.9) **salvation** (2 Corinthians 5.19-21, Hebrews 9.14) and **resurrection** (Galatians 1.1, Romans 6.4, 8.11, John 2.19).

The parable also teaches us three important principles concerning lost sinners.

- The sheep was **helplessly** lost. It had no power or wisdom of its own to return.
- The silver was **unconsciously** lost. It had no knowledge of its condition.
- The son was **wilfully** lost. He had made a conscious decision to rebel.

All lost sinners are in this condition and this is the way **we** were, however, it is beautiful to see that the parable teaches there is no depth of sin from which a lost sinner cannot be saved.

Finally, it is important to see the way in which God's grace is displayed throughout the parable.

- The sheep and piece of silver were sought without their co-operation. This is grace that **seeks**.
- The son, however, does co-operate and determines to return to his father. This is grace that **receives**.

We played no part in our salvation, for salvation is of the Lord. By His grace, He **sought** us. By His grace He **bought** us and by His grace He **receives** us. Despite this we should also remember that man has a **responsibility** in the question of salvation. Sheep are too silly to return, the piece of silver could not return (as it had no inherent life), but the son made a conscious decision to return. Man has free will. He can and must choose to repent or face eternal ruin.

The Shoulders of the Shepherd (vv.4-7)

The shepherd 'tending' his sheep was a common sight in the Middle East. In the morning he led them from the fold to the pasture, going **before** and **calling** them. They followed him, knowing his voice (John 10.4). He supplied their every need and watched their every move. He would be willing to give his life to protect the flock (John 10.1-18).

'What man of you, having an hundred sheep' (v.4). The Lord Jesus is encouraging the Pharisees and Scribes to see themselves in the person of the shepherd (and therefore encourage compassion for the lost sheep), but in fact he is a picture of the Lord Jesus. He is the:

- **Good** Shepherd (John 10.14). This emphasises His **past** work at Calvary.
- **Great** Shepherd (Heb. 13.20). This emphasises His **present** work in Heaven.
- **Chief** Shepherd (1 Pet. 5.4). This emphasises His **future** coming and reward.

In the parable, the 'man' loses one of the sheep. It is certainly not God's fault that mankind is lost in sin. Mankind is lost because of mankind's actions. However, it is true that God lost when Adam sinned. He lost the enjoyment of man's **presence, fellowship** and **praise**. Once a sheep is lost, the Shepherd will 'go after that which is lost until He find it'. The one lost sheep (representing the publicans and sinners) is of great value to the Good Shepherd. He will pursue it until He finds it. Where is the lost sheep found? At **Calvary**! This is where He found us. Praise God that the Lord Jesus will ever seek out and **find** the poor, lost sinner who has been awakened to his need.

Once the sheep is found it is placed on the 'shoulders' of the 'rejoicing' Shepherd. The shoulders in Scripture are the place of strength. It has often been said that **one** shoulder is sufficient for the government of the universe (Isaiah 9.6) but two are required to carry the lost sheep through the wilderness. The High Priest of old used to bear two onyx stones upon his shoulders as he ministered in the Tabernacle (Exodus 28.12). On each of these stones was engraved six names of the tribes of Israel. The picture is of the Lord Jesus who ever represents us before God in the place of strength. Whatever trials and tribulations will face us during the Wilderness journey, we are safe, secure and strengthened upon His shoulders (Philippians 4.13).

Where are we going on His shoulders? We are **not** going back to the **99** which have been left in the Wilderness (v.4). They represent the self-righteous Pharisees, those who saw no need of repentance (v.7). We are also **not** going to the **fold**. This speaks of the bondage of Judaism. *John 10.16: And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one ~~fold~~ (flock), and one shepherd.* Rather, we are going **home**. *6 And when he cometh home...* It is not a case of 'if' but 'when'. How important to ever remember that Heaven, not this earth, is our home. Philippians 3.20: For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We should not be comfortable here on earth as we are **strangers** (away from home) and **pilgrims** (on the way home) here. Do we love earth more than heaven?

The Striving of the Spirit (vv.8-10)

These pieces of silver were likely joined together in a chain and worn on the forehead. They were often given by the husband to seal the marriage ceremony, very much like a ring is given to do the same today. As such, these coins were not of any great financial worth, but of the highest personal value. One piece of silver (or a drachma) was equal in value to one denarius (Roman currency) which was one day's wage for a common labourer (Matthew 20.2).

The 'woman' (v.8) speaks of voluntary submission and is therefore an apt picture of the Spirit of God. *Ephesians 5.22: Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.* The husband and wife relationship is a beautiful picture of Christ and the Church. As the Church submits to the authority and headship of Christ, so the wife voluntarily submits to her husband. Of course, this does **not** imply inferiority or inequality on the wife's part. So, the Holy Spirit is ever the submissive, unnamed servant who seeks to exalt the Person of the Lord Jesus (John 16.13-15).

The Spirit of God is also seen more fully in the woman's actions (v.8). She 'lights a candle' which speaks of the witness and testimony of the Word of God (Psalm 119.105). This dispels the darkness and exposes the dirt of sin. She 'sweeps the house' reminding us of the unseen, private searching of the Spirit of God as He seeks to bring conviction and sweep away the accumulated dust and dirt of Satan's lies (John 16.8). Finally, she 'seeks diligently', a picture of the striving of the Spirit of God (Genesis 6.3, Acts 7.51).

Again, the lost is found with great rejoicing (vv.9-10). Note. When the silver was **lost**, its **position** was *down in the dust* and its monetary **value** was *nothing*. When the silver was **found**, its **position** was *honour and glory* and its monetary **value** was *restored*. Likewise, believers have been given a position of great glory (Ephesians 2.6) and we can now be of value in God's service. What are we worth in our service for Him today?