

The Parables of Jesus

Lesson 4

The parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin are perfect lessons on the heels of the parable of the prodigal son. God loves us and wants to keep us safe and secure in His arms.

Parable of the Lost Sheep – Luke 15:1-10

Setting for the Parable

Jesus was in the midst of a Jewish audience, including some Pharisees and priests. He was telling the people, which included those despised tax collectors and other sinners, about great truths of God's love and work. The Pharisees and priests warned Jesus to remove himself from these sinners so he wouldn't become unclean. The thought that Jesus was also eating with the sinners disgusted this group of self-righteous men.

The parable of the lost sheep is spoken in response to the Pharisees' statement, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Jesus tries to teach all of them a lesson...so let's look at what He taught.

Telling of the Parable

A Shepherd's Heart – The parable of the lost sheep tells us that a sheep possesses value. The sheep can reproduce into more sheep. It can provide wool for clothing and food to meet the need of hunger. During Jesus' time the spotless lambs of the fold were also a sacrifice to God. Sheep were extremely important to humans. Like the sheep's value to humans, people are extremely important to God. He values every one of us. Every person has the ability to bring joy to God. In fact...it is expected of us. God has a shepherd's heart - He cares for us, loves us and takes great pleasure in us.

A Sinner's Peril – The parable of the lost sheep is told in an interesting manner in order to illustrate a spiritual principle. The person living in a sinful lifestyle is in view here. God greatly desires that sinners enter the fold. God is always working, forever pulling sinners to where they need to be. He lets the wayward sinner fulfill those sinful desires, waits him out and then gently leads him home.

Have you ever "left the fold?" We all know someone who has fallen away from God. This person is the lost sheep. This lost sheep has gone out into this dangerous world as easy prey to the wild beasts and unforgiving natural elements. The sheep has little in the way of natural defensive abilities. This natural helplessness is why a sheep so desperately needs a loving shepherd. They're in the midst of worldly wolves...totally vulnerable and easy prey to the one anxiously waiting to devour them.

Meaning of the Parable

God's love and caring nature leads him to depart from the comfort and strength of the flock to come and search for that sheep gone astray. God doesn't want even one sheep to wander away from Him.

The parable of the lost sheep ends happily because the Shepherd has found His sheep at last. The battered, bruised and hungry sheep was wandering alone...rejected by the world. The faithful Good Shepherd found His sheep and returned it to the fold. It's time to celebrate! The Shepherd lovingly

carried the sheep home around His shoulders. He called His servants and neighbors and they all celebrated the found sheep.

Don't forget this important point from the parable of the lost sheep...the sheep is joyful, relieved and once again safe in the arms of his loving Shepherd. Soon this precious sheep will be healed and strengthened as well as much more faithful and trusting in the Good Shepherd.

Parable of the Lost Coin – Luke 15:8-10

The parable of the lost coin is similar to Jesus' parable of the lost sheep. A peasant woman portrays God in this interesting story about the value of a person. The woman seems to be living alone and enjoying a meager savings of coins. The coins are all she has to sustain her livelihood.

The coins have value to her. They are important. Her money can be used to buy the necessities of life.

She has done so much work to collect this small but vitally important savings. One day she notices that a coin is missing. She becomes very concerned, "How did this happen? It was here yesterday, but now it's gone. The coin must have rolled off the table the last time I counted them. Who knows where it could have gone? I'll light my lamps so I can see in the dark places. I'll grab my broom so I can sweep the floors of my entire house until I find it!"

The woman diligently searches for the lost coin. Finally she finds the coin which was hiding in a dusty, dark, hidden place. She grabs it and wipes off the dirt.

The woman is so happy because she found her coin. She has restored the valuable coin to its rightful spot. She takes immediate pride in the coin...shining it so it becomes just like new. She calls the neighbor women and invites them to her very clean house to celebrate. Her coin was lost but now it is found.

The three parables from Luke 15 have a direct audience of the Pharisees and priests...people who have wandered far from God but think everything is ok. Bible scholars have generally viewed these three parables together and concluded their main message to be this...

Our loving God demonstrates His love for His wayward children by seeking and restoring them. God and all of the heavenly hosts rejoice when a valuable person turns to Him in repentance and faith.

We could go on and discuss whether or not the Trinity is represented with God as the Father in the Prodigal Son parable, Jesus as the Good Shepherd in the Lost Sheep parable and the Holy Spirit as the woman in the Lost Coin parable. We could talk about the lamp being the gospel and the broom being the law. We could discuss many more things in these parables but the main message in all three of them is full repentance and trust in God. Always keep that in mind.

Get This!

The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin share two important characteristics. God is the main character and the object of His affection is a wayward child. God notices when one of His own wanders. He seeks and searches not stopping until they are found. Once the object of God's affection is returned to his safe place all heaven rejoices. Nothing brings greater joy to God than a repenting person placing their faith in the Good Shepherd.

So...what can we learn? What should we do?

There are four potential attitudes we can possess towards those who wander and then return...

1. We can coldly despise and judge them
2. We can ignore them with cold indifference
3. We can welcome them when they come to us
4. We can have a heart like God and do our best to help restore them.

Obviously, #4 is what God desires of our attitude. Here is what we should and should not do. We should not judge, we should not avoid. We should be aware of where God is working. We should do our best to help restore those who are wandering and caught up in a sinful lifestyle.

We can only serve Him when we are spiritually sensitive and that comes through Bible study, prayer and service. Let's get busy!