

Jesus The Friend Of Sinners.

Text: Luke 15:1-10

Suggested Hymns:

391, 317, 144, 320, 170

1) Is Illustrated By The Parable Of The Lost Sheep

2) Is Illustrated By The Parable Of The Lost Coin

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Luke 15:1–10, *¹ Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”*

³ So He spoke this parable to them, saying: ⁴ “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ ⁷ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

⁸ “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’

¹⁰ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our Gospel contains two parables, the one is about a lost sheep, the other a lost coin. The incident by which these two parables were prompted is given in the following statement of our text, *¹ Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees*

and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”

St. Mark informs us that Jesus *was dining in Levi’s house, that many tax collectors and sinners also sat together with Jesus and His disciples.*¹ The man had invited Jesus and His disciples to come and dine with him, and Jesus accepted the invitation and came. And behold, all the tax collectors and sinners were there too, sitting at the table with Jesus and following His teaching with close attention.

Who were these tax collectors and sinners? They were the scum of society, people with whom no respectable person would associate. Tax collectors were people who were commissioned by the Roman emperor to extract the taxes from their respective districts. They had to bring into the treasury a stated sum of money. But they did not get a certain percentage of those taxes. Neither did they get a fixed salary from the government.

The government left it to them to see for themselves what profit they could make out of the bargain. The more taxes they extorted and ground out of the residents, the greater was the profit in their own pocket. Theirs was a trade which required hard-heartedness and cruelty to be successful.

They robbed the poor and took all they could from the rich. For this they were known throughout the country. Being in league with the Romans, they were looked upon as traitors to their own country and regarded by every patriotic Jew with hatred and contempt.

The sinners, linked together with these tax collectors, were nothing more or less than the word means. Having made their money in an ill way, the tax collectors also very often spent it in an ill way, with the worst of men and women. They made company with bad people and ate and drank with them. Tax collectors and harlots are often mentioned together.² Such was the company in which the Pharisees, on a certain occasion, found the Lord Jesus.

Were they surprised? ‘Surprised’ is an understatement. They were shocked. They murmured, that is, grumbled, gave vent to their ill-feelings, and then burst out, *“This Man receives sinners and eats with them,”* which was as much as to say, *‘Does this man mean to be a teacher come from God? A promoter of morality? A respecter of the commandments?’*

If He really is what He claims to be, how can He lower Himself so much as to seek the company of these outcasts and even to eat and drink with them? Why does He not avoid them, and shake them off, and keep aloof from the very filth of the nation?'

And what is Jesus' response? Far from admitting any wrong in His conduct and attitude toward these tax collectors and sinners, He defends every part of His action and illustrates His friendly feelings toward the sinners by two parables.

Let us therefore consider, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, *Jesus The Friend Of Sinners*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Jesus The Friend Of Sinners Is Illustrated By The Parable Of The Lost Sheep

The first parable is this, ⁴ *“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’”*

We must bear in mind that Jesus said this parable to defend His receiving sinners and eating with them; and there are two points in the parable showing conclusively that Jesus is the Friend of sinners. These two points are the shepherd's care for all the sheep, and his joy when a lost sheep is found again.

To this day people will sometimes think like the Pharisees and scribes, and look down upon those who are stigmatised as great sinners and did some great wrong, and speak of them and act as if they should be excluded from the love of Jesus, as if they should be given up as lost, and as if nothing more should be done for them to save them.

Even parents are sometimes so cruel as to cast out their own children, when they have fallen in sin, and thereby have brought shame and disgrace upon the family.

When a person realises that he is a great sinner, that he has committed a great and serious offence, it is generally difficult to make him understand that Jesus still loves him. He will think, *‘What does Jesus care for me, a great sinner*

that I am? My sin is too great; it cannot be forgiven; there is no hope for me; I am lost.'

But what does this parable of the lost sheep teach us? It teaches us that Jesus is the Friend of sinners, and that He cares for all the sheep. The whole human race may be compared to a flock of sheep.

Jesus is the great Shepherd of that flock. He bought that flock with the price of His own precious blood. He died for all and thereby redeemed them all from sin, death, devil, and hell, and gained for them eternal life. He is the "*Savior of all men*,"³ as the Bible says.

Where is the shepherd who does not care for a sheep of his flock, especially if that sheep was purchased at a high price? Where is the shepherd who would not feel extremely sorry if he would lose that sheep, and would not do all in his power to get it back when it strays away from the fold?

Behold, then, such a Shepherd is Jesus. Do not say, therefore, '*This man or that man has no right to appeal to Jesus; he is too great a sinner; it is useless to tell him of Jesus; how can Jesus have anything to do with such an outcast?*'

If any of you have a neighbour or relative who has fallen into sin, and if it was into utter shame, then for the sake of Jesus who ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners, never cast off such fallen sinners, never trample on them, and never turn your back upon them.

They are miserable enough already. Do not add one drop to their cup of bitterness. And you, O sinner do not think, '*What does Jesus care for me, a great sinner that I am!*' Jesus does care for you. Our immortal soul is just as precious to Him as the soul of the greatest saint.

Remember that you are a sheep of the great flock of the redeemed, of those whom He Himself bought with His own precious blood. Even the vilest sin on your part cannot exclude you from the great Shepherd's care. He has come to call sinners to repentance. The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Another point in the parable showing that Jesus is the Friend of sinners is the shepherd's joy when he found the lost sheep. Some of the greatest artists have

made pictures of this parable. Jesus is represented as a shepherd tenderly and carefully rescuing a lost sheep from the thicket where it is caught.

And again Jesus is represented surrounded with a flock of sheep and carrying on His shoulders the lost sheep, His countenance beaming with delight, because He was successful in getting back this one lost member of His flock.

We must not think that it is a matter of indifference to the Lord Jesus whether He loses one of His sheep or not. No; as great as is His sorrow when a sheep is lost, just as great is His joy when the lost sheep is found.

When Jesus was dining in the house of that tax collector, in the midst of tax collectors and sinners, He certainly did not wear a long, sober face because He felt uncomfortable and out of place in such company. He was happy and joyful. Why? Because those around Him were lost sheep that had been found again.

They had come, not for the purpose of indulgence, not for the purpose of having one of their sinful revels, but *“to hear Him,”* as the text says. They came to repentance, lamented their sins, and desired to know how they might be saved.

Jesus is the same Friend of sinners to this day. Not only does He receive sinners, but He also receives them joyfully. Let the greatest sinner come, come to Jesus in true repentance, and he will not meet with a cool reception. Jesus will always be highly delighted to receive him and to extend to him the full and perfect forgiveness of all his transgressions.

2. Jesus The Friend Of Sinners Is Illustrated By The Parable Of The Lost Coin.

The second parable of our Gospel conveys essentially the same truth, namely, that Jesus is the Friend of sinners. Jesus says, ⁸ *“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’*

¹⁰ *Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

As stated before, this parable of the lost coin teaches essentially the same truth taught already by the parable of the lost sheep, the great central truth, that Jesus is the Friend of sinners.

But upon close investigation we find that there is some difference between the two parables as to the points of comparison.

Who is the woman that laments the loss of a piece of silver, and then lights a candle, and sweeps the house, and searches every nook and corner for the lost coin?

Does the Lord Jesus mean to compare Himself to the woman, as in the first parable He compares Himself to the shepherd? This cannot be; for the woman lost the coin from carelessness; and does not Jesus say distinctly, ***“Of those whom You gave Me I have lost none”***?⁴

Or does Jesus mean to compare the Holy Spirit to that woman? The Holy Spirit we know, does the great work of converting the sinners and getting those back by turning them from their wicked ways.

It is the Holy Spirit who calls, gathers, enlightens, sanctifies, and keeps in the one true faith the whole Christian Church upon earth. But there is no passage in the Bible where the Holy Spirit is compared to a woman.

No; Luther’s explanation, undoubtedly, is the only correct one. Luther says, *“This parable of the woman deals with the Christian Church, which holds the office of the holy ministry for this purpose that the poor sinners may be called to repentance, and may be saved from eternal death and damnation.”* The point of comparison here, then, representing the woman, is the Church.

And what is the coin, the piece of silver? Upon a coin is impressed an image and superscription, generally the image of the ruler of the country, and the name and value of the coin.

Now when God created man, He stamped upon man His own image. But that image was lost in the fall. Since the fall man is no more like God. Our original righteousness and blessedness is lost, and our nature is depraved. We are all lost and condemned sinners.

But it is not God's will that man should be lost. He sent His beloved Son Jesus Christ to restore in man the image of God, beginning already in this life. This restoration, according to the will of God, is to be made already in the infant.

Infants are to be regenerated in Holy Baptism and made heirs of the kingdom of heaven. These, then, are the pieces of silver in the parable, souls that have been won over to Christ and have been made His own in the holy sacrament of Baptism.

While in the first parable the flock of sheep is the whole human race, inasmuch as all have been redeemed, and Jesus is the Saviour of all, the ten pieces of silver are those who by Baptism have been connected with the Church.

But do all remain in their baptismal grace? Do all stay with the Church? No; as they grow up many are lost in the world and wander away from the house of the Church, to which they belong by the right of Baptism. These are the lost coin, lost in the world and its evil lusts, lost in the filth of sin or in the barren wilderness of infidelity.

And now see the great love of Jesus to these deserting sinners. He yearns to save also these from eternal destruction. He has the Church look after them and search for them with the eagerness and anxious care of a woman who is determined to find the coin she has lost in the house, shining a light into the corners, sweeping the rooms, and sparing neither time nor pains to regain that which was lost.

The light is the Word of God, which is powerful to enlighten the most darkened minds; and great is the joy not only in the visible Church upon earth, but in heaven also, among God's holy angels, when such a sinner repents and returns to the house of God which he had deserted.

May the Lord, our God, gently seek all those who have strayed away, and turn the hearts of those who are afraid to come to Him on account of their sins; for as we read in 1 Timothy 1:15, ¹⁵ ***This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*** Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Mark 2:15

² Matthew 21:31

³ 1 Timothy 4:10

⁴ John 18:9