

# The Lost Sheep and Lost Coin

Most churches, businesses, civic organizations and social groups want more members. Most people believe that success is measured by the number of members or the amount of financial wealth. If one of the members becomes unhappy, it is rare that anyone chases after them in order to keep them unless they have been a significant member. Often, the general attitude is that it is probably best they left or, “We are sorry they left, but we have so many other members. Why should anyone be troubled? The rest of our group will go on. Why should any effort be given to one individual when the rest of the members need attention?” What attitude should Christians have toward those who are not believers who might visit the church and not return for some reason? What priority should we give to them? Some will say, “I hope they will return” and then start talking with a friend in the church about plans for lunch. Are you indifferent to unbelievers? In our study we will discover that God wants us to pursue those who have visited and left the church. Our study is Luke 15:1-10. It is about two parables: “The Lost Sheep” and “The Lost Coin.”

**TAX COLLECTORS AND SINNERS.** Time has elapsed since Jesus gave the parables and illustration in Luke 14. Luke 15 begins by telling us that those whom the religious leaders despised were coming close to Jesus in order to listen to Him.

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” Luke 15:1-2 (NASB)



In Luke 7:34 Jesus announced to a crowd that the religious leaders condemned Christ because He ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners. Later in Luke they will criticize Jesus for being a guest of Zaccheus, a tax collector (Luke

19:7). In sharp contrast Luke 18:11-13 records these words from Christ about a Pharisee and a tax collector,

“The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers,

or even like this tax collector. ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’” Luke 18:11-13 (NASB)

This was not the first time that the Pharisees and scribes (experts in interpreting the Old Testament) grumbled that Jesus was involved with sinners in some way. Luke 5:30 tells us they did not like Jesus dining with tax collectors and sin-

Obviously, the Pharisee was proud and considered others to be inferior.

Who were these people the Pharisees called sinners? We understand tax collectors as men who collected taxes for the Romans. Especially, odious to the Pharisees were Jews who collected taxes for the Romans. Consequently, they were considered betrayers to the nation of Israel. But who were the sinners? Luke 7:39 helps us understand that sinners included those who had some serious illness. Surely, they had committed some horrible sin and as a result deserved to be afflicted with an illness. In John 9:16, 24-25 we discover the Pharisees also considered Jesus to be a sinner because sinners were common people, non-Pharisees who violated the strict laws of the Pharisees.<sup>1</sup> William Barclay writes,

. . . there was a complete barrier between the Pharisees and the People of the Land. The Pharisaic regulations laid it down, 'When a man is one of the People of the Land, entrust no money to him, take no testimony from him, trust him with no secret, do not appoint him guardian of an orphan, do not make him the custodian of charitable funds, do not accompany him on a journey.' A Pharisee was forbidden to be the guest of any such man or to have him as his guest. He was even forbidden, so far as it was possible, to not have any business dealings with him. It was the deliberate Pharisaic aim to avoid every contact with the people who did not observe the petty details of the law. Obviously, they would be shocked to the core at the way in which Jesus kept company with people who were not only ranked outsiders but sinners, contact with whom would necessarily defile. We will understand these parables more fully if we remember that the strict Jews said, not 'There will be joy in heaven over one sinner who is obligated before God.' They looked forward not to the saving but to the destruction of the sinner.<sup>2</sup>

Since Jesus had a different heart attitude for the lost, He would dine with and teach both the Pharisees and the people of the land that they would die in their sins if they did not believe in Him (John 8:24). That is everyone was a sinner

destined for hell. The sinners included all non-Pharisees, especially the poor, crippled, blind and lame in Jesus' parable of "The Great Kingdom Banquet" from Luke 14:21.

**PHARISEES GRUMBLED.** On this occasion we are told that the Pharisees were disturbed that the tax collector and sinners were coming to Jesus. Luke 15:2 says that once again they grumbled. The Greek word for grumbled is *diagonguso*, which means "to mutter." The verb tense is the imperfect which means that they were repeatedly muttering or muttering over and over again. One can imagine a Pharisee making a critical comment and a few seconds or minutes later making another negative comment. Their complaint was that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners and *spent time with* them. The Pharisees believed Jesus should have rejected them by avoiding eating with them and refused to even talk with them. That was their view of being godly, spiritual men.

They had the idea that righteous people avoided anyone who did not keep their long list of detailed rules. This is an important lesson for Christians who ignore all non-Christians. Maybe they quote 1 Corinthians 15:33,

[Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." 1 Corinthians 15:33 \(NASB\)](#)

If they do, they miss the point that the verse is telling us to not spend too much time with them because they will influence you to compromise morally. Yet, we are not told that Jesus spent *all* of His time with tax collectors and sinners. 1 Corinthians 15:33 is a warning to those Christians who party and dance with non-Christians in order to become friends in order to bring them to Christ. Neither Jesus or the apostles ever told a Christian to do that. In fact, 1 Peter 4:2-4 warns Christians not to indulge in such behavior and not to be surprised when the unsaved want you to behave as they do!

It is important to notice that Jesus did not live with them or seek their friendship. His primary goal was to minister to them, not to become their friends. He was their Savior and Lord if they would respond by believing in Him. He was seeking to help them to believe in Him as their Messiah and

1. Grant R. Osborne. Matthew. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Zondervan. 2010. p. 336.

2. William Barclay. Gospel of Luke. The New Daily Study Bible. Westminster John Knox Press. 2001. pp. 236-237.

Savior. The gospels reveal that He spent most of His time with His own disciples. Are you like Jesus or the Pharisees?

**PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP.** It is obvious from the next verse, Luke 15:3, that either Jesus heard them grumbling or knew their thoughts (Luke 11:17) since He responded to their grumblings with a parable that should have convicted them of their proud heart.

So He told them this parable, saying, “What man among you,

if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over

one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” Luke 15:3-7 (NASB)

The parable is simple and one that is easily understood in an agrarian culture. The parable says that a shepherd had one hundred sheep out in a pasture. The actual Greek word for “pasture” means desert or an area with little vegetation. One of them wandered off, maybe looking for more food. We are not told how the wandering sheep escaped his notice,

but that is not important to the parable. What is important is that the sheep was lost. We could say that the sheep was stupid and careless. That is why it wandered away. We say that maybe it was hungry. It could have been eaten by some hungry animal. It was not wise. The lost sheep is symbolic of the tax collectors and the sinners whom the Pharisees despised and believed were going to hell because they did not keep their long list of detailed rules that they believed would help a person gain eternal life. Surely, the Pharisees noticed

this symbolism in the parable.

But the lost sheep is also symbolic of every person who is going to hell. The Greek word for “lost” is *appolumi* which can also be translated as “perish.” Since this verb is in the perfect tense, we should understand that Jesus is telling us that the sheep symbolized the spiritually lost who were going to perish. The lost sheep is a picture of every unbeliever since they are going to hell.

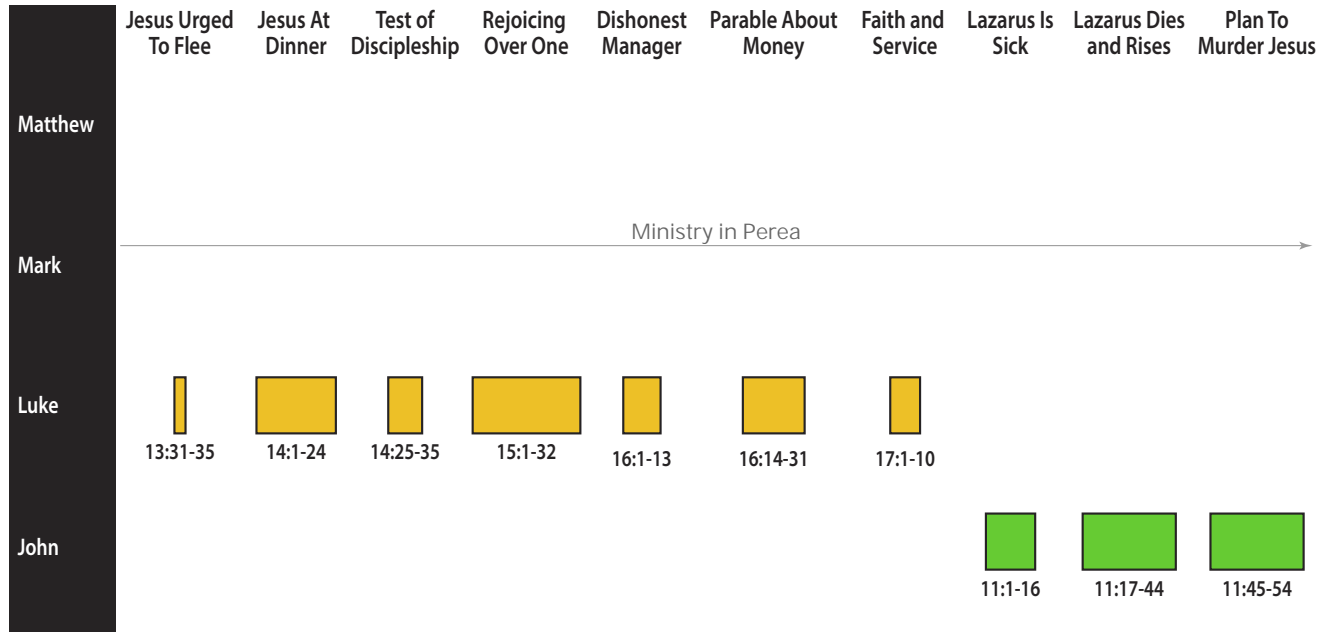
Because the sheep was lost, the shepherd understood the urgent need to find the helpless animal. Therefore, he left the ninety-nine sheep and searched for the one lost sheep until he found it. When the shepherd found the lost sheep, he was happy and placed it on his shoulders in order to bring it home.

**THE LOST SHEEP WANDERED AWAY.** It is important to notice that in this parable the lost sheep did not do anything to save itself. It had wandered away and was not looking for the shepherd. This reminds us of Isaiah 53:6 which says,



# Life and Heart of Jesus

Ministry In Perea - Fall of A.D. 32



All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
 Each of us has turned to his own way;  
 But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all  
 To fall on Him. Isaiah 53:6 (NASB)

The sheep went astray and did its own thing. The lost sheep is symbolic of each one of us at birth until we become a Christian. Romans 3:23 tells us that everyone has sinned. Everyone has gone astray; so that includes you and me! Every person is born into this world as a sinner (Romans 5:8) and is destined for hell. Romans 6:23 says that the wages of sin is spiritual death. John 3:18 states that every person has already been judged. That occurred at birth. We are spiritually lost at birth and our subsequent sins prove it. We are born lost and continue to be lost until we believe in Christ.

He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. John 3:18 (NASB)

The helpless sheep had been lost and continued to be lost. It symbolizes everyone or all unbelievers destined for an eternity in hell.

**LOST SHEEP WAS DRAWN TO THE SHEPHERD.** The lost sheep symbolizes every unbeliever in another way. The shepherd has to find them before they will “find” Him! The lost sheep did not search for the shepherd. Instead it wandered off. It was not looking for the shepherd. Romans 3:10-11 tells us that we were not really interested in searching for God either. This is a quote from Psalm 14:1-3 and Isaiah 53:6.

... as it is written,  
 “THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE;  
 THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS,  
 THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;” Romans 3:10-11 (NASB)

Now you might say, “I searched for God!” The reason you searched is that God the Spirit drew you to Himself (John



6:44).

**No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. John 6:44 (NASB)**

If you are a believer, then you responded to God's "effectual pull." He put the desire in your heart and then you wanted to come to Christ. You felt like you did it all, but you didn't. That is the way salvation works. It was the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, who found you and drew you to Himself. Acts 3:16 and Ephesians 2:8-9 state that God gives Christians the faith to believe in Him. John 16:8-11 tells us that the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin. Salvation is a gift from God and the entire Trinity is involved. In this parable the shepherd persistently searched for the sheep and not the reverse. A gift is not a gift if we do something to earn it. A gift is not a gift if we deserve it. If we deserve it or earn it, then it is not a gift. But salvation can only be obtained as a gift. That is the message of Romans 4:2-5, which says that you cannot earn salvation or righteousness. You cannot earn it by having faith or repenting. It is all the work of God.

**THE SHEPHERD TAKES HIS SHEEP TO HEAVEN.** When the shepherd found the sheep, he placed it on his shoulders and took it home. Home in this parable symbolizes heaven. The sheep did not have to climb up onto his shoulders or direct the shepherd to take it home. The sheep did not prove that it was saved by doing good works. The shepherd simply found it and took it home. This is a picture of God's work in our salvation. He ensures our salvation.

The message of Scripture is that while we are urged to believe in Christ in order to gain eternal life (John 3:16; 3:36), salvation is entirely the work of God. He convicts us of our sins (John 16:8-11), draws us to Christ, and gives us faith in Christ. We are living in this grace (Romans 5:2) and He continues to cause us to grow spiritually.

**For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. Philippians 1:6 (NASB)**

Notice God says that He continues to work in us. Either

you will join the effort by reading the Word, daily praying and confessing your sins or God will discipline you. A true Christian will suffer until he or she flees sin. God is at work! One of the evidences that you will observe in your life is increasing victory over sin (Romans 8:13-14). If you are sinning less and less and the fruit of the Spirit is growing in your life (Galatians 5:15-23), then you can be assured that you are going to heaven when you die. If you are not growing, then you know that you are not a Christian and you are most likely *still* lost. You will perish and go to hell for eternity. We should add that one major mark or evidence in the life of a Christian is humility (Matthew 5:3-12).

**THE SHEPHERD REJOICED.** Then we are told that the shepherd rejoiced because he found the lost sheep. "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'" Proverbs 12:10 says that the righteous man cares for his animal. Jesus' parable is a great one! It reveals that our heavenly Father is righteous and loves us! our heavenly Father is righteous and loves us!

**A righteous man has regard for the life of his animal, but even the compassion of the wicked is cruel. Proverbs 12:10 (NASB)**

When Jesus says there is more joy over one sinner who repents, He is telling us that the sinner needed to repent. The righteous persons had already repented and were going to heaven. Jesus is emphasizing the fact that the sinner need to repent; when he or she does, heaven rejoices.

**I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Luke 15:7 (NASB)**

Now Jesus is teaching us that one sinner who repents is more important than the ninety-nine who do not need — to repent.

Why would God rejoice over a repentant sinner? Because the repentant sinner was no longer lost and going to hell. The Pharisees cared about their animals, but they did not care about the lost sinner. In fact, they prayed that God

would punish the lost sinner! Are you a righteous man who cares about your dog, cat or some other animal? Do you also care about the lost sinner who is going to hell? Jesus did! The righteous person cares about the lost.

**PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN.** Then Jesus gave a parable about a lost coin.

Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!'"  
Luke 15:8-9 (NASB)

This parable is like the previous parable except instead of one hundred sheep, there are ten silver coins. The Greek word that is translated as "coin" is *drachme*. It was a drachma, a silver coin which

was worth the amount of money an hourly employee could earn in one day. In both parables either one sheep or one coin is lost and either the shepherd or the woman searched for what was lost. Each time there was joy when the lost item was found. Why did Jesus present two parables that are almost identical? Why did He use an illustration of a lost sheep and a lost coin? Because the first parable shows the importance of saving the lost, even though many have already been repented, while the second reveals the intense effort every Christian should give to reaching the lost. Indirectly, Jesus also taught that the Pharisees should be like the shepherd and the woman who carefully searched for the lost.

**ANGELS REJOICE FOR ONE REPENTING SINNER.** In verse 10 Jesus reaches the conclusion of the two parables.

In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Luke 15:10 (NASB)

While the Pharisees would not have rejoiced over the sinner who knows he or she needs to repent, the angels in heaven who are before God will rejoice over just one sinner. The angels do not wait to rejoice until a crowd of sinners repents. What a sad rebuke for the Pharisees. They thought that

they were godly, righteous men, but they were proud, heartless and self-righteous. When Christ spoke of the angels who stood before God, He wanted to make sure that the Pharisees understood that He was referring to the holy angels and not the evil angels or



Angels In Heaven Rejoice

demons. Jesus contrasted the holy angels with the attitude of the Pharisees. The angels rejoice over a new believer, but the Pharisees do not! Do you rejoice?

**CONCLUSION.** As we close, can I ask you, how do you compare to the Pharisees or to the holy angels? Do you avoid those who are not as wealthy as you? Now is not that the common question that is asked? Maybe a better question for some of us would be do we avoid the wealthy? Do you criticize them or perhaps have a negative attitude toward them? I have known of men and women who have criticized the wealthy. They have expressed disdain for them as a group as well as for some individuals. Many think it is okay to

criticize the wealthy as evil people. They think the rich are wealthy because they are evil. They have missed the message of 1 Samuel 2:7 which says that God determines who is wealthy and poor.

**The LORD makes poor and rich;  
He brings low, He also exalts.  
1 Samuel 2:7 (NASB)**

Is it okay to criticize Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, King David and Job for being wealthy? Would it be okay to criticize a wealthy Christian? When we do that, we are like the Pharisees. If a wealthy person is not a Christian, they also need the Savior. We need to be concerned about them, too! The truth is that the poor are often maligned just as much as the wealthy. We tend to like those who are like us, those who love us too! Now we need to ask ourselves who deserves to hear the gospel and go to heaven? Only those who are like us?

Our next question is, “If you avoid non-Christians, why?” As we have already discovered, the Pharisees looked down upon those who did not follow the strict “religious” rules they had created. Supposedly, anyone who did not follow their rules were not good people. So they called them “sinners,” and tax collectors were considered the scum of the earth. They avoided them and expected other “righteous” people to do the same! They did not have a heart for the lost. They hated Gentiles and did not want to be near them or have a meal with them.

Do you speak to or have a meal with those who are lost in order to eventually share Christ and the gospel? Maybe you say, “I do not have time!” Is it not the truth that you do not make time for them? If you have friends, you make time to be with them, do you not? How much do you care about the spiritual condition of your neighbors? Do you care that they might be going to hell? Do you know enough about them to know if they are headed for the fiery hell? The Pharisees did not care! But the holy angels in heaven care more than we do! They rejoice over every repentant sinner.

My third question is, “Do you please Christ by sharing the gospel about Jesus?” In John 4:34-38 Jesus told the disciples that He busy doing the Father’s will. Then He spoke

about sharing the good news — the Gospel.

**Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, ‘There are yet four months, and then comes the harvest?’ Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, that they are white for harvest. Already he who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for life eternal; so that he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this case the saying is true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored and you have entered into their labor.” John 4:34-38 (NASB)**

He added that some Christians plant and others reap. That is, some shared that Jesus died on the cross in order to forgive our sins and that His resurrection proved He was God (Romans 1:4) and proved His sacrifice for our sins was accepted by God the Father (Romans 4:25), but no one responded. Others were able to see those individuals become Christians by having faith in Christ.

It is important to know that sharing the good news is not arguing with non-Christians about evolution or facts about the Bible. Evangelism is not telling them to come to church and hear your pastor preach. It is you actually sharing with them that Jesus is God and telling them the gospel.

Then He urged them to sow and reap too! Are you doing the Father’s will too? In Matthew 9:37-38 the apostle Matthew added something else that Jesus said. What did Jesus tell them to do?

**Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.” Matthew 9:37-38 (NASB)**

He urged them to be workers in the harvest and pray for many more Christians to work in the harvest, too - to plant and reap!

Do you sow or reap? Do you care about the tax collector and the sinner? Do you rejoice when a sinner humbles himself or herself and repents of his or her sins and submits to Christ? Or, are too busy with your family and those friends

who are like you? Are you too busy watching movies and eating at restaurants and doing other things? Do you love seeing a sinner repent as the angels do?

Finally, if you are a Christians the parable of the lost coin reveals that heaven rejoiced when you repented. Even though God caused you to be saved, He and the angels rejoiced when you repented. God loves you!