

## Luke 15:1-10

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus to hear him. <sup>2</sup>But the Pharisees and the experts in the law were complaining, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup>He told them this parable: <sup>4</sup>“Which one of you, if you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that was lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup>and goes home. Then he calls together his friends and his neighbors, telling them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!’ <sup>7</sup>I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

<sup>8</sup>“Or what woman who has ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, would not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup>And when she finds it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found the lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup>In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

## One

### I.

There’s strength in numbers. They got that. It was understandable to want to gather large crowds around you. Really important people have lots of followers. It is desirable to have lots of “likes” and “retweets.” The famous want to have millions of social media followers; it’s good for business. The more people who follow you, the more influence you can have over their behavior. They will buy your products. They will emulate your fashion. They will seek to speak like you and walk like you.

The Pharisees and experts in the law could understand Jesus wanting lots of followers. *They* were the religious establishment. Experts in the law refers to experts in *God’s* law. They were considered experts in what God wanted from people. They were influencers.

There was, however, a problem with the way *Jesus* was influencing and the way *Jesus* was collecting followers. “The Pharisees and the experts in the law were complaining, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them’” (Luke 15:2, EHV).

The influencer—the celebrity—the important person—doesn’t want to mingle with the riffraff. You board your private jet; when you land, you are whisked away in your chauffeured limousine. You don’t go out to dinner with the “regular” people who might follow you on social media. You don’t sit down to talk with them; you might talk *to* them, speaking from the safety of a stage, but you never mingle and chat with them. They are too common.

You can just picture Jesus talking with the riffraff, can’t you? You can see him taking an interest in regular people. Many didn’t consider little children important, but Jesus did. Most people, including these Pharisees, shunned tax collectors and those they called “sinners,” who were in less than honorable professions. Jesus didn’t. Jesus talked with foreigners, like the Samaritan woman, whom most wouldn’t have given a second glance. He touched lepers who were outcasts from society. Jesus mingled with all sorts of disreputable people. He didn’t hide behind his armed security detail or only shake hands across a rope line to keep his fans at arm’s length.

Did the parables that followed explain his behavior to the Pharisees and experts in the

law?

## II.

“Which one of you, if you had one hundred sheep and lost one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that was lost until he finds it?” (Luke 15:4, EHV).

Think about Jesus’ parable for a minute. Is it *really* such a given that the owner of a flock of sheep would go looking for one that got lost? After all, the majority of your wealth was safely gathered in one place. To leave the 99 there without supervision could well mean that others would get separated and lost. Perhaps the best idea would be to cut your losses. If it had been some time, the sheep might already have succumbed to predators, or have fallen off a cliff. Why waste your time looking for it? To paraphrase an old TV show, logic would indicate that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few—or the one. (Star Trek) Is it *really* so obvious that a wealthy man would neglect most of his fortune and spend the bulk of his time taking care of a small fraction of it?

“Or what woman who has ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, would not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?” (Luke 15:8, EHV). The second parable describes a woman who had a little nest egg saved up. I do mean “little.” Each of her coins were about 1 day’s wages. At \$20/hour, each coin was worth \$160. Her whole nest egg was \$1600. 1/10th of that was significant enough that when it was missing, she went on a search to find it.

This parable seems to make more sense. A poor woman certainly wants to make sure she has every penny available; it might be needed soon.

## III.

Did the ending of the parables surprise you? After finding the one sheep, the rich man “Calls together his friends and his neighbors, telling them, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!’” (Luke 15:6, EHV). How many rich people throw a party when they recover a small portion of their wealth? It doesn’t seem all that likely.

The poor woman, when she finds her lost coin, “Calls together her friends and neighbors and says, ‘Rejoice with me, because I have found the lost coin!’” (Luke 15:9, EHV). How many poor people throw a party when they find a lost \$160 from their nest egg? Even less than the number of rich people throwing a party for reclaimed wealth.

Our God is a surprising God.

“I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent” (Luke 15:7, EHV). Jesus paid a high price for every single sheep. His blood and his righteousness were what was necessary to buy us back from sin, death, and the devil. It took tears as he anticipated the pain to come in the Garden of Gethsemane. It took the sweat that fell from him like great drops of blood. It took his literal blood, poured out on the cross, to buy back every lamb and every sheep in the world from sin. Every single one is precious.

Sheep are dumb. Sheep will just nibble at the grass with no awareness of anything around them. They nibble themselves into being lost and don’t know how to get back to the flock.

Sinners are just like sheep. We have been bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus, but it’s easy to just nibble away at the grass and get lost. Other things take priority over the good food of the gospel in God’s Word and the sacraments. Some activities seem to be valid reasons to miss church now and then. We nibble away at those things, and they become more and more frequent. God’s Word and his will occupy less and less time until the

wandering is complete, and we have lost our way.

Jesus cares about every single sinner he paid for. He wants you. He wants you even when you have nibbled your way off into the distance. He loves you. He comes looking.

Logic might dictate that the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the one, but not for Jesus. When the one is found, there's a party.

"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, EHV).

A lost coin presents a different scenario than the lost sheep. The sheep just nibbled its way into being lost. The coin didn't *do* anything to become lost. Something happened *to* it. It was lost because of the circumstances.

Some sinners are born into the circumstances of being lost. They don't know Jesus. They don't know about his blood, sweat, and tears. They don't know about the high price he paid for them to be bought back from sin, death, and Satan. They don't know, but it's still true.

Logic would indicate that the one isn't very valuable, just like the coin worth a day's wages. The needs of the many outweigh the needs of that one, not very valuable coin.

Not to Jesus. That one is just as important as all the rest. Jesus loves the one. Jesus paid a high price—far higher than the face value of the one individual. He goes looking for that one, just as much as he goes looking for the sinner sheep who nibbled his way away from the truth.

As before, when Jesus finds that one, there's a party.

#### IV.

Can you see yourself in Jesus' two parables? Circumstances might have made you like the coin—just missing. Sometimes, perhaps, you nibble away from the flock of Jesus' lambs and sheep. Jesus has to come looking for you.

Can you see yourself in the tax collectors and the sinners Jesus sat down to dinner with? You are just the common, ordinary, everyday people Jesus had no qualms about associating with.

Can you see yourself in the Pharisees and experts in the law? Do you criticize Jesus for associating with the riffraff? Perhaps you even become annoyed that certain people in certain groups would be considered for admittance into your sanctuary.

I think we would all have to admit that we have been found in every one of these categories.

Now add one more: the seeker. None of us are Jesus. We won't be perfect in our attitudes or our actions in seeking the lost. Still, make every effort to see the one as important.

Today we begin the Let's Go evangelism Bible class.

Jesus thought the one lost by circumstances was important enough to go looking for. Let's go and look for that one lost soul, too. Willingly. Making a lot of effort.

Jesus thought the one that nibbled away from the flock was important enough to seek to bring back. Let's go with Jesus to look for that lost sheep, too.

Let's go and be part of the joy in heaven when the lost is found. Amen.