

Who you spend time with determines a lot about you. Calvin is going to public school and starting to make friends. So, now we begin the process of wondering and worrying about who the friends are. What are their parents like? Will they be a good influence on him? And this is normal for most parents. Because we don't want our children to hang out with the wrong crowd.

In Jesus' day people worried about this as well. But it was not just something for children. This was something everyone had to pay attention to. You only spent time with the right kind of people. You only spent time with the righteous. And yet one of the most controversial parts of Jesus' ministry was that He spent a lot of time with the wrong crowd. He hung out with people that no self-respecting Jew would want to be around. The people no God fearing leader should be seen with. And they were not just invited to be His disciples, but He invited them to

And the religious leaders hated this. They saw this not just as controversial but as proof that Jesus was not as good and righteous as people said. Because if He was really righteous, then He would know better. He must be secretly as bad as they are.

And we need to have our own relationship with sinners challenged as well. Because a lot of the time we are not the sinners in these stories, we are the Scribes and the Pharisees.

Turn with me to Luke 15 in your Bibles. We will look at three well known parables. And they are not just meant to show us how Jesus feels about sinners, but they should force us to examine our own attitudes. Do we view sinners as people to keep away from our families? Or do we view them as people God loves?

Point 1: **Jesus pursues sinners.**

Jesus tells us three different parables.

There is the parable of the shepherd and the sheep.

The parable of the lost coin.

And the parable of prodigal son.

Which would be more accurately titled, the parable of the two brothers.

All three of these parables are trying to teach us the same thing. So I am going to do something a little different this morning. Instead of just going slowly through every verse in order, we are going to bounce around a little bit. Because each of these parables are teaching the same lessons. And the first lesson is that Jesus pursues sinners. They are frustrated that Jesus spends all this time with sinners. They think He should be separate from them.

The people complain that Jesus eats with them.

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

You notice they are not telling Jesus this. They are just grumbling to themselves. They are grumbling to other people. They are just doing lots of grumbling.

And they have two objections to Jesus.

First, they are angry that He receives sinners. When sinners come to meet and talk to Jesus, He does not send them away. He welcomes them into His presence. They can come and talk to Him.

But they also are angry that Jesus invites them to His table.

He shares a meal with them.

In their culture this was a no-no.

Sharing a meal with someone implies that you approve of them.

And Jesus spending so much time with sinners seems to imply that He is okay with their sin.

But Jesus wants them to know that He does more than that.

He does not just spend time with sinners.

He is intentionally pursuing the lost.
He is going after them.
He is seeking them out.
So He begins His first parable.
He tells a story of a shepherd who loses a sheep.

Verse 3, **"So he told them this parable: 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it."**

The picture is of a shepherd out with his flock.
And he does the count to make sure he has everyone.
But when he counts, he discovered that one of the hundred is missing.

Now this is a rather modest flock.
It is not so large that the shepherd would not care about the lost sheep.
But it is not so small that this loss would be devastating.
Yet, the shepherd goes to find the lost one.
He leaves the 99, what seems totally alone, to find it.

And Jesus says this is normal.
When He says, **"what man of you?"** This implies every shepherd does it.
This is what shepherds do.
They would leave the other sheep behind and look until they found it.

Then He tells another story of a woman who loses a coin.
Verse 8, **"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?"**

Don't picture a penny or a quarter.
I pick up coins off the ground and it drives my wife nuts.
This is not minor change.
Each of these coins is like a day's wage of work.
Instead of a coin, you might picture your paycheck.

Picture your own paycheck that you haven't deposited yet.
And now you can't remember where you set it down.

When would you start looking for it?
Would you put that off for tomorrow or do you look right away?
Do you give a cursory survey of the house?
Or do you look everywhere?
Do you look for five minutes then give up?
Or are you going to not stop looking until you find it?

This is what the woman does.
She looks everywhere.
She lights a lamp, which would cost her money.
Because she needs to find it.
She starts sweeping the dirt floor.
She pushes the dirt all over trying to see if it got buried by something.
She will pursue that coin until she finds it.

If we do this with stuff,
If people search this way for sheep and for money,
How much more does Jesus do this with us?

This is the same lesson Jesus has been trying to teach them about the Sabbath.
If they act one way towards their animals, they should act that way towards others.
If we look for lost things, how much more will God look for lost people?

Because Jesus actively pursues sinners.
He does not sit back hoping they will find their way home.
He does not sit in the comfort of the temple.
He does not avoid the sinners in the streets until they clean themselves up.
He goes to find them.

Toys often disappear at my house.
So we don't look very hard and just say, "eh it will turn up."
Jesus does not act that way towards sinners.
He comes to find them.
He does not wait for us to figure it out on our own.
He eats and welcomes them at His table.
Not because He approves of their sin.
But because He loves them.
And He wants them to know that He is here waiting for them.

Because Jesus seeks after sinners.
This is the entire reason that He came.
Jesus values the lost and the unsaved more than coins or sheep.

If this is you.
If you are not a follower of Jesus.
I want you to know that Jesus is pursuing you.
He is looking for you.
He left all the comforts of heaven to come down to earth to search for you.
And even right in this moment He is calling you to Him.
He won't stop looking until you find Him.

Point 2: **Jesus receives sinners with joy.**

Jesus will receive any sinner who comes to Him with joy.
Being found by Jesus is when someone becomes a Christian.
It is when they do not just eat with Jesus at the lunch table.
It is when they repent of their sins.
When they put their faith in Jesus as their Savior.
When that happens, Jesus receives them with joy and celebrating.

This is the end of the first two parables.
This is how the man who finds the sheep responds.

Verse 5, **"And 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 that was lost.'"**

He rejoices and celebrates!

He does not yell and beat the sheep.

He does not call friends over to complain.

He rejoices and carries it home to throw a party.

This is how the woman responds,

Verse 9, **"And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.'"**

She jumps for joy having found her coin.

She celebrates and wants people to come over to rejoice with her.

Now we can understand celebrating in those cases.

But the question we might have is, will Jesus act that way towards me?

We can understand Jesus receiving some sinners with joy and kindness.

But some aren't sure that Jesus will do so to them.

You might worry that your sins are too great.

God could be happy other sinners repented, but not you.

This is where the last parable comes in.

Verse 11, **"And he said, "There was a man who had two sons."**

We have gone from sheep, to coins, and now to sons.

And we have gone from 1 out 99, to 1 out of 10, to 1 of two.

What could be more precious than a lost child?

And what could be more hurtful?

Verse 12, **"And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them."**

The younger son is a fool.

He comes to his father and basically says that he wishes he was dead.
He can't wait to get out of this terrible town.
So he wants the inheritance now so he can leave.
This would be wild for a child to say this now,
This would have been almost unthinkable back then.

But the father responds with grace.
He gives both sons their inheritance.
That is an important detail we will come back to later.

Verse 13, **"Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living."**

He does not wait long before he leaves.
It seems like he sells everything he gets quickly.
He gathers the money and packs his bags.
He goes far away to another country.
And he wastes all the money.

We find out later that this reckless living in verse 30 is on prostitutes.
Probably also gambling, drinking, and whatever other selfish vices he could find.
All of the money was spent foolishly in an Ecclesiastes like search for pleasure.
But the money runs out and problems come.

Verse 14, **"And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need."**

He spent every dollar he had foolishly.
And now a crisis has come, not just to his life but the land.
There is a famine and an economic depression.
Now he has to face the consequences of his sinful choices.
Because for Israel, famine is a covenant curse from God because of their disobedience.

Verse 15, **"So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs."**

This shows his desperation.

He finally has to get a job.

And the only one he can find is becoming a feeder of pigs.

This would be a job most Jews would refuse to do.

Pigs are unclean animals.

To be responsible for them would make them unclean and unable to worship in the temple.

Verse 16, **"And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything."**

His state gets even worse.

It is not just that he has a demeaning job.

He already has the lowest job he could imagine.

But it is even worse than that.

He still can't afford food.

He is so hungry that he wants to eat with the pigs.

But he can't.

He does not even get their food.

He gets nothing.

This is his lowest point.

I want you to picture when that moment has been for you.

When have you felt like you were at the end of your rope?

When your sin has left you hopeless and in despair.

When you have no hope of escape.

This is where the son finds himself.

Verse 17, **"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!'"**

He has a moment of clarity.
He seems to come to his senses and realize how foolish he has been.
He hated living at home, but it was not as bad as he thought.
Even the lowest servant was better treated than he is now.
So he makes a decision to go home.

Verse 18, **"I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."**

This is planning on what he will say.
And it is him wanting to repent.
He is willing to admit his sin and mistreatment of his father.
He admits his sin against God.
He expects nothing and confesses everything.

This is true repentance.
He is not asking for everything to go back how it was.
He is not just upset that he is poor now.
He recognizes the depths and consequences of his sin.

He does not even want to ask to be a son again.
He realizes that he forfeited that right.
He gave it up.
He is willing to just be a servant.
If he just did not have to starve, then that would be enough.

I have to imagine that he rehearsed this speech.
The whole journey home trying to craft what he will say.
I can only imagine the nerves and anxiety he had.
I would have wondered the entire time, "what will my dad say?"
Will he say, "I told you so."
Will he tell me to kick rocks and I got what I deserved?

Some of you may wonder what God will say to you.

Will He accept you?

Will He forgive you, but only begrudgingly?

Look at how the father responds.

Because this is how Jesus and our Heavenly father responds to us.

Verse 20, **"And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."**

The father welcomes him.

Even as he is a long way off.

The father sees him,

The father feels compassion for him.

He runs to meet him.

He hugs him and kisses him.

Before the son has said a word.

The father loves him.

The father welcomes him before he can get out a word of his speech.

Just as Jesus does.

Verse 21, **"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'"**

He starts the speech.

He begins to confess his sins and repent.

He acknowledges that he is not worthy.

But before he can finish.

Before he can make his request,

Grace is already coming.

Verse 22, **"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and"**

celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate."

The father will not let the son be a servant.

He will be his son again.

He will be restored to his former place.

What was lost is found.

The son who was dead is now alive.

And the father wants to have a feast.

Because this entire time the father has been waiting.

He has been looking for his son on the horizon.

And finally he comes.

This is true for us as well.

God is sitting here waiting for us to confess our sins.

And as soon as we do, there is grace.

Often we are too afraid to confess our sins.

We are afraid of what people will say.

We do not want to be found out.

We wonder what our confession may cost us.

And so we hide our sin.

And we sit with the pigs.

But Jesus is waiting to receive us.

He sits in heaven on His throne hoping we will come to Him.

And He will gladly receive even the worst of sinners with joy.

We just have to confess.

So come to Jesus and find grace.

Whether it is your first time or your millionth.

He will receive you with joy.

Point 3: **How do you act toward sinners?**

All three of these parables are meant to confront us.

The context of the stories is important.

Jesus tells them in response to the crowds anger at His spending time with sinners.

And the stories are not just about revealing Jesus' attitude toward sinners. It is meant to tell the Pharisees and religious leaders that their attitude is wrong.

They need to change how they act toward sinners.

In the same way these stories are meant to confront us.

We are to examine our own attitudes towards sinners.

How do we act towards them?

A side effect of calling the last parable, "the parable of the prodigal son" is that we forget about the other son.

There are two sons in the story who sin.

The younger brother's sin is more obvious and public.

The older brother's sin is more internal and self-righteous.

But both are sinful.

And both brothers are lost.

One of the first things we need to do is recognize that we are sinners.

We have to see that we are sinners.

We are not more deserving of grace than others.

Jesus came and found us too.

Look at the older brother in the story.

Verse 25, **"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant."**

There is a big celebration and party.

The older brother wants to know why.

"What is the occasion?" "Why are we celebrating"

Verse 27, **"And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'"**

The occasion is that his sinful reckless brother has returned.
And his father has shown him grace and received him with joy.
But how does the older brother react?

Verse 28, **"But he was angry and refused to go in."**

His first reaction to hearing that his brother is back is anger.
And he refuses to join the party.
He refuses to eat and drink with a sinner.
This sounds just like the Pharisees.
Who see Jesus celebrating with sinners and refuse to join.

"His father came out and entreated him,"

Right away this is grace again.
The father does not leave this son alone.
He comes to talk to him and to explain.

Verse 29, **"but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'"**

He is angry that his sinful brother gets grace.
He is angry that he is received with such joy.
And he is mad that he has never received a great party like this.

Conveniently, he is forgetting that his father has already given him his inheritance.

He has already received plenty of goats.
And now the older brother just wants a meaningless party with friends.
Not a party to celebrate the redemption of a sinner.

Verse 31, **"And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"**

Again the father is gracious.

The older brother does not recognize it.

He gently rebukes him.

He reminds him that he always experiencing the blessing of the father's presence.

He always experiences the blessing of all the fathers possessions.

But now for one moment the younger brother gets some of that grace.

And he is angry.

But he should be celebrating.

Because it is fitting to celebrate the lost being found.

It is fitting to celebrate the dead being brought back to life.

It is fitting to celebrate people coming into the kingdom of God.

This is what Jesus wants us to see.

It is fitting to celebrating sinners finding new life in Christ.

It is not just right for Jesus to eat and drink with sinners.

It is wrong for the Pharisees not to.

They need to let go of their anger and to join the celebration.

This is why the refrain to join the celebration is repeated.

"It is fitting to celebrate."

The shepherd calls us to join.

"He calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'"

The woman with the coin calls us to rejoice.

"saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The question is do you celebrate with sinners?
Do you seek out the lost as Christ does?
Do you receive them joyfully?
Or do you expect them to stop acting like sinners first?
Do they have to jump through hoops before you will be accepted?

We should not just grumble about sinners.
We should not just ignore them.
We should not just hope they find Jesus eventually.
We should go and find them.
We should invite them into our lives and into the kingdom of God.
We should show them that they are welcome in the kingdom.
We should preach the gospel.
That Jesus came and died to make them righteous.
He bought them with His own blood so that they can be sons and daughters of the king.

Jesus rejoices when sinners join the family.
Angels rejoice.
We should rejoice to.

Do you rejoice?
This is one of the reasons I love baptisms.
It is a time of celebrating and officially welcoming people into the kingdom.
It is like our adoption ceremony where we publicly recognize you are one of us.
It is a great time of rejoicing.

To celebrate the lost being found, my home church growing up used roses.
They would place a rose at the front of the service to represent every person who came to faith that week.
It was a wonderful and tangible way to celebrate.

That isn't the only way to do that.

But we need to ask ourselves if we are treating the lost how Jesus did.

Do we seek them out?

Do we receive them with joy?

Are we celebrating when they come to Jesus in faith?

Or do we grumble like the Pharisees?

Do we expect sinners to get their lives together before they are welcome in at our table or in our church?

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] Jesus pursues sinners. Jesus receives them with joy. How do we act towards sinners?
2. [Challenge] Even now there is celebrating in heaven of the repenting sinners. The music is playing. If you could quiet your soul you can almost hear it. Will you join in the party, or will you grumble?