

## **Luke 15:1-10 The Savior says, "Rejoice with Me!" Pentecost 17 September 11, 2016**

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Grace and peace to you from God who sent His Son to seek and find you that you may be His own! Amen. God's Word to fill us with joy that no one can take away is from Luke 15:1-10.

These are Your words O God, of our loving Savior who has found us by Your truth. Your Word is truth.

Dear Christian Friends,

Every school or store has a place to claim lost things. There is usually a collection of items: stuffed animals or children's toys, old umbrellas, a single glove, a pair of sunglasses, and clothing! If people don't own any of the lost items, they don't care about them. But when people find a lost item that belongs to them, they will be truly happy! If we help them find a lost toy or glasses, we are happy with them. All people are dear to God. He does not want anyone to be lost. So, when a spiritually lost person is found:

### **The Savior says, "Rejoice with Me!"**

**We rejoice when we have Jesus' concern for the lost.** When our lives get so busy, it's easy to lose sight of why we are here: to help the lost see Jesus! The Pharisees and teachers of the law tried to guide the lost by giving them more laws to follow. They had good intentions. They were combating foreign ungodly practices that corrupted their people. Sadly, instead of using God's Word to defend the faith they had their own set of rules, which became more important to them than Scripture. Their man-made law-centered rules became the most important thing for people to keep. People who didn't keep them were shown no mercy.

The thinking of the Pharisees is still here. Martin Luther wrote, "There is a little Pharisee in each of us." It is in our nature to go beyond God's Word and take matters into our own hands. Those of us old enough to live through the attacks of 15 years ago today, remember the reaction of our nation. At first it was shock and a feeling of vulnerability. Then, the thinking, apart from God's Word was: we want vengeance beyond justice with no mercy for those who plotted and carried out this attack on innocent Americans. People wanted those who plotted this to be put on the next plane to hell. No one wanted them to repent!

Now, let's consider how our verses showed this point. "*The tax collectors and 'sinners' were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'*" (v.1-2) I'm not surprised that the Pharisees got this wrong. It's easy to do. What we are supposed to do is to hate the sin and love the sinner. They hated the sin and the sinners whom they thought so much worse than them. How do we keep from having this same lack of love for the lost?

We remember that we are sinners. We were not so good that God was swayed to show mercy to us. We didn't bomb the World Trade Center, but we have amassed sins against God and against each other that are higher than those twin towers were. Isaiah wrote, "*Our offenses are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us.*" (Isaiah 59:12) He also wrote, "*Your iniquities have separated you from your God.*" (Isaiah 59:2) Isaiah was not writing to Islamic attackers, but to God's people. All of us daily sin much and deserve God's wrath and punishment. The Apostle Paul realized his sinfulness and knew that he was saved only by God's mercy. In our earlier lesson from 1 Tim., Paul called himself "*the worst of sinners.*" (1:16) But he also wrote, "*Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.*" (Ephesians 2:4-5)

God has shown His grace to us in Christ. We are forgiven sinners. We are motivated because Christ has saved us and He has given us a command to reach other lost sinners. We have known God's love for ourselves and we want everyone to know of it. Yet, like the Pharisees, there are still attitudes inside that keep us from reaching out to certain people. How could Christ teach us to get past this?

He told two stories: of a lost sheep and a lost coin. Even the Pharisees understood the need of a lost sheep. If it wasn't found, it would be attacked or fall or be injured and die. Today, people have sympathy for pets in need. Jesus was telling the Pharisees and us if we can show compassion for an animal, how much more we should have compassion for people, no matter who they are. Just as the lost sheep and the lost coin were important to the owners, all people are important to God. And, they should be to us who represent God. With the same love for sinners as Jesus had, we will have the proper motivation to reach other people.

**Second, we are to imitate Jesus' joy!** In Jesus' parable, the shepherd noticed a missing sheep and immediately went out searching for it. He wouldn't give up until that sheep was found. In the example of a lost coin worth a day's wages, again we see a woman who searched diligently until it was found.

Just as a sheep couldn't guard itself, take care of itself, or find its way back when lost, we couldn't escape from the devil, death or hell until Christ rescued us. God's Son left the glory of heaven and assumed a human nature. He lived a sinless life among sinners. Then He gave His life on a cross, suffering all the consequences of the lost. He suffered the lostness of hell and of death to give us the right to be God's people once again. Jesus rose from death, and through His Word He found us and He keeps us in the saving faith to the end. For the U.S., 9/11 was a terrible tragedy. But, for Christians on the planes or in the buildings who died, it was a day of victory! The moment they died, their souls were with Jesus in heaven and all the angels rejoiced! God wants more people to experience that joy before their life ends! He sends His Word to seek and save the lost. God called us to be His children when we were baptized in His name. It happened today for Mikki. Jesus promised, "*Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.*" (Mark 16:16) God's Word gives us a shelter to which we can return in repentance daily to receive Christ's forgiveness. Be glad in this!

Jesus said, *the angels of heaven rejoice over one sinner who repents!* (v.10) Repenting isn't only telling God once that we're sorry for sins. It is part of our on-going life of faith! By repenting we confess our sins and trust in Christ's forgiveness. The Bible says, "*Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.... We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.*" (Ro. 5:1-2)

Our salvation from judgment and eternal death should give us joy! And seeing lost people, who are brought to faith through baptism or the word of the Gospel, should make us just as joyful. Christ died so everyone could have the opportunity to be saved. Let us gladly share that saving news. And when we see a "sinner" fallen along the way, let's not just shake our head and walk away in disgust. Think of the lost sheep and the lost coin that were so valuable to their owners. The souls of people are of so much more valuable! There is no rejoicing in heaven when lost sinners die without Christ. May God use us to reach the lost before it's too late! Share God's Word of Jesus' love and sacrifice! It will bring great joy to all who believe!

Will there be a "lost and found" section in heaven? Yes! Not things, but people who were lost like us and were found! Now is not the time to think about who we should exclude from heaven like the Pharisees did. Now is the time to rejoice that Jesus has prepared place for us in heaven and to think of all God's angels rejoicing when lost sinners like us repent and believe in Christ for eternal life! Amen.