

Friend of Sinners: Luke 15:1-10

After paying just a few of their bills, Larry turned to his wife and said, "I guess we can stop fighting about money, because we don't have any left to fight over." **Houston Chronicle, 10/29/97, p. 8D**

In 2010, in the U.S., the total number of bankruptcies filed, more than doubled from those filed in 2006 (617k to 1.6 million). This year there has been a 10% drop from last year. Consumer consciousness and a longer foreclosure process have been proposed as possible reasons for the decrease.

Business CY 2006-2010	and	Non-Business	Filings
Year	Total	Non-Business	Business
2010	1,593,081	1,536,799	56,282
2009	1,473,675	1,412,838	60,837
2008	1,117,641	1,074,108	43,533
2007	850,912	822,590	28,322
2006	617,660	597,965	19,695

There are currently 13.3 million people unemployed, and many of them have had to live on credit to make ends meet.

As a Nation, we are in the same predicament.

However, our Government gets what it needs to pay the bills from those of us who still are holding on to our jobs by our fingernails.

As this working population of taxable citizens dwindles, more and more pressure will be applied to raise their taxes and collect what's owed to Uncle Sam, through whatever means are possible.

This was what was happening with the Roman Empire in the days of Jesus. To collect the ever increasing taxes from its subjects, tax collectors were sent into the highways and byways to demand what was considered owed.

In the text we will be looking at today in **Luke 15**, it begins by saying in **verses 1-2...**

"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."

Sinners were people who were excommunicated from the synagogues and usually held as outcasts.

The righteous religious of Jesus' day had trouble associating with anyone who collected taxes for Rome. They were thrown into the same general classification of "**sinner.**" Why? Well, they were usually Jewish people that Rome contracted and who took advantage of their status by overcharging.

Would we have had trouble seeing Jesus befriend these people instead of us? I think we might have.

Let's face it, we get so riled up politically with people who aren't on our side of the fence, that we have a hard time reaching out to them.

Either we've written them off as bad guys who we'd rather not associate with or we've gotten into a fight with them over issues that keep us from now being able to share our faith effectively with them.

Be a good citizen and do what you need to in peaceable nonjudgmental manner. Jesus did not take the political stance they expected from the Messiah; *He was and still is the Friend of political outcasts and sinners.*

At the end of Jesus' teaching in the previous section, He questioned the sincerity of all those that followed Him by likening them to salt.

Luke 14:34-35, *"Salt is good; but if the salt has lost its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? 35 "It is neither fit for the land nor for the dunghill, but men throw it out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"*

Matthew's account in 5:13-14 adds these words...

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden."

I'm sure we have all heard this expression used, "**The salt of the earth.**"

"The phrase "salt of the earth" is a well known idiomatic expression that we [now] use to refer to very good people." There are other popular English phrases that refer to salt, for example, 'worth his salt', or 'with a grain of salt.' These phrases express the long-standing importance and value salt has had in society. Another

phrase not so common is "**beneath the salt.**" Where did this originate?

In mediaeval England salt was expensive and only affordable by the higher ranks of society. Its value was due to its scarcity. Salt was less easily obtainable in northern Europe than in countries with warmer climates, where it could be obtained more cheaply by the evaporation of seawater.

At that time the nobility sat at the 'high table' and their commoner servants at lower trestle tables. Salt was placed in the centre of the high table. Only those of rank had access to it. Those less favored on the lower tables were below (or beneath) the salt.

These phrases perpetuate an erroneous notion of human value.

When Jesus called His disciples the salt of the earth and the light of the world, He said they were so because they do good deeds that draw men to His Father in Heaven and season hearts with the savor of good works that cause people to give thanks to God.

These were not statements about their value as humans but about their value as functionaries; **to tastefully draw people to God.**

Jesus confounds His listeners and their estimation of themselves and others by asking what value salt has when it ceases to do what it was made for?

His question results in some unique responses from His listeners.

Luke 15:1-2, "*Then all the tax collectors and the sinners **drew near** to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes **complained**, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."*

The graciousness, compassion, and love of the Lord draws like salt, the despised and most miserable of the earth. On the other hand, it also excited the complaints of those who had elevated their value in their own minds as the righteous - who stayed away from those of lesser value.

His words of hope fell upon the hearts of those "**beneath the salt,**" so to speak, like the breaking of a new dawn and Jesus welcomed their approach.

Instead of receiving them with a coldness and discourtesy, He received them gladly. And despite the social impropriety of eating with them He did so with gracious hospitality.

Matter of fact, He not only received them – He went to where they were at. In the case of **Zaccheus**, a tax collector, He went to a party at his house.

Luke 19:7 says, "*But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."*

To the self-righteous religious mind, however, this was a flagrant breach of the proprieties which was unpardonable and so they vented their dissatisfaction and disgust with a loud scornful murmur, "**This man receives sinners, and eats with them.**"

If Jesus had abstained from eating with sinners what they ate or drinking the wine they drank (*this was the Nazarite vow John the Baptist took*) it really would not have mattered; they would have condemned Him either way!

Jesus even says this was the case in ...

Matthew 11:16-19, "*But to what shall I liken this generation? It is like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling to their companions, 17 "and saying: 'We played the flute for you, And you did not dance; We mourned to you, And you did not lament.' [you didn't come play with us]18 "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 "The Son of Man came eating and drinking, [He is saying this about Himself] and they say, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is justified by her children."*

In today's lesson, the Lord will reason with His objectors concerning His kindness and grace towards sinners by using three parables; the **Lost Sheep**, the **Lost Coin**, and the **Lost Son**.

With minor differences, the 3 parables have the same overwhelming themes. Let's look at the first parable.

I. THE LOST SHEEP – HE GOES AFTER

Verse 3-7 " 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."

The lost sheep is a symbol of an oblivious, thoughtless sinner: one who follows the corrupt dictates of his own heart, without ever reflecting upon his conduct, or considering what the consequence of his sinful way of life will be.

No creature strays more easily than a sheep; none is more oblivious; and none more defenseless and exposed to be devoured by wolves and wild beasts.

The Lord says He has lost His sheep to sin. And we were all like lost sheep at one point or another.

Isaiah 53:6 *"All we like sheep have gone astray..."*

But having lost but one sheep, He leaves the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and goes after the lost one (cost what it will—shame, reproach, criticism, scorn, rejection, by the 99), He goes after it until finds it—love perseveres without rest even when its unpopular.

He would even lay down His own life even to bring it back, for He loved the sheep and was concerned for its life more than His own.

He has brought out each one of us from beyond the power of that darkness, when we were helpless, terrified, and ruined by sin.

Christ's love is an active, energetic love. Just as a shepherd would never just sit around complaining about his lost sheep, so our Lord did not and still doesn't just sit still in heaven complaining about sinners.

Luke 19:10 *"for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost"*

If you feel lost today groping about in the darkness, rest assured, Jesus will never abandon the hope of saving you. Though the darkness and danger you are feelings is causing you great fear He will go after you until you let Him pick you up and carry you home.

We should never abandon the hope of finding every lost person on the face of the planet, and like salt and light draw them to the Good Shepherd; they are lost and are His greatest priority.

It means that we must go to them where they are! Just be careful not to cross the line of the flesh being in control rather than the Spirit.

Oh, the self-righteous religious crowd will probably say, *"Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" But you know what? **Wisdom is justified by her children.**"*

You'll win people to Christ and find new brothers and sisters who will call themselves the "children of God."

Jesus came into the world to save sinners, so there is no need of a Savior for people who are not sinners. But by what measure would one sheep have more priority than 99?

After all, He left them alone to fend for themselves. Prudence might suggest that *"two in the hand was better than one in the bush,"* so to speak. Isn't it a question of comparative value?

For that He provides the next illustration...

Verse 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?"*

II. THE LOST COIN – HE SEARCHES

It seems rather absurd that the loss of a single small silver coin called a **drachma** (about a half a cent) could cause so much concern to this woman.

What to others would be incidental or cheap, to its possessor might be a treasure beyond our estimation.

Jesus uses this to illustrate **value** or **worth** from the eternal perspective. It seems like her poverty was so terrible that even one small coin in such a case might grow into a value far beyond its intrinsic worth.

But it may be possible that the ten drachmas were part of a typical necklace worn by women of the East.

This necklace was given by the bridegroom to the bride at the time of marriage, and like the ring of Western life, it was considered a symbol of love and sacredness.

It must be worn on all public occasions, and guarded with a jealous care; it wasn't like just another ordinary ring on any other finger. If left unworn by the wife in public, it was an indication that she had been careless in losing it or maybe even was flirting with unfaithfulness; in the same way that people might hide their rings from unsuspecting inquirers.

Throwing, then, this light of Eastern custom upon the parable, you can see why she would have been so concerned in finding the missing coin!

It must have amazed these sinful people to hear that sinners were of such great value to God. Those who consider themselves most worthless before God, He considers most valuable or worthy to be sought out.

And as you can see, this idea of **value** continues to play out in the three parables.

In the first parable was the valued lost sheep, in the second the valued lost coin, and in the third it is a valued lost son.

III. THE LOST SON – HE WAITS & WATCHES

Read Luke 15:11-32

Tired of the restraints of home and the surveillance of the father's eye, the younger brother determined to see the world for himself, to be free, and give in to his passions as he so chose.

With a cold bluntness, he says to the father, "*Father, give me what rightfully belongs to me,*" a demand that shows plainly his self centeredness and immaturity.

No son, much less the younger, had any right to demand it.

But the father grants his request, dividing "*unto them,*" as it reads, "*his living;*" for the estimating of the younger son's portion could only be done while taking into consideration the elder son's portion too.

Not many days after—finding his wings,—the youth gathers all together, and he flies the coup making his journey into a far country.

"*And there he squandered his wealth in wild living,*" scattering it, throwing it away after self indulgent pleasures.

"*After he had spent everything*"— there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he found himself in want, in need, unsatisfied by everything that had seemed so promising from a distance.

But when famine strikes where will you find satisfaction? Nobody where he was then could satisfy his needs. He had been forgotten by everyone he knew ... except for His father!

Jesus paints us a picture of a lost son, who is hopeless, and in misery and squalor.

When the sheep and the coin were lost there was an eager search, as the shepherd followed the wanderer over the mountain ridges, and the woman with broom and lamp went after the lost coin.

But when the youth is lost, flinging himself away, the father does not follow him, except in **thought**, and **love**, and **prayer**. He sits "*still in the house,*" nursing his bitter grief waiting and watching for His son's return on the horizon.

For it says that "*while he was still a long way off, his father saw him*", *and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*"

It seems as if the father's vision was fixed, riveted to the spot where the form of his son had earlier vanished out of sight; for no sooner was he within sight of home than the father's eyes, zoomed in on him with love, and recognized him, even though his clothes were filthy and torn, and his walk no longer had the bounce or the strut of a proud youth.

Now the remorseful silhouette of a broken soul approaches, and the emotions of the father rush out like water from a breaking dam.

He even "ran" to meet him, forgetful of his rights as the worthy of respect father, he throws himself upon his son's neck; he kissed him with fervent kiss of love.

The storm of emotion was so passionate that no word was necessary in the mutual embrace.

However, when the power of speech returned to the youth the silence is broken.

"Father," he said, repeating the words he resolved to speak in the far country, "I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

It is no longer the sense of physical need, but the deeper sense of guilt, that now burdens his soul.

There is a full and frank confession with no attempt at defending himself. He doesn't try to gloss it over, but beating his breast bitterly, he confesses his sin with "a humble, remorseful, and submissive heart," hoping for the mercy and forgiveness he doesn't deserve.

Even before his confession is complete, the father forgives him not allowing him to finish his sentence, as his father commands his servants to clean him up.

And it is here we turn to a second common truth that is emphasized in these parables; that is that the Heavenly Father...

LONGS TO and DOES RESTORE

A. As with the sheep

The shepherd brought his lost and weary sheep home on restful shoulders.

He laid them on His own shoulders, bore all the burden, the poor sheep weary and worn out by his sinful wanderings like tax-gathers and sinners; He carried them on His own shoulders.

As miserable as they might be to the self-righteous, when they drew close to Jesus he loved and welcomed them. And He still does today! And ...

B. As with the coin

The woman lit a candle, and swept the house, and searched diligently until she found her lost coin and restored it to its setting.

We have been numbered with His flock the community of believers, His church which He boastfully refers to as His bride.

C. As with the son

The servants are commanded to bring the best robe;

a ring of family significance; new shoes for the scrapped and bruised feet.

In each case we see the helpless made whole and restored.

But this search doesn't end with just a restoration. There is more!

The Heavenly Father throws a party...He Rejoices!

As in the case of the sheep

Verses 6-7 "Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.'"

As in the case of the coin

Verses 9-10 "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin. In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

As in the case of the son

Verses 24-25, 32. "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' **So they began to celebrate. 25** "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard **music and dancing. 32** But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

Christ's love is a deep love that rejoices when sinners come to Him.

Why shouldn't he eat and make merry with them having welcomed them into the fold, or set back in their proper setting or returned home to their Father? It was a sure sign of a heart overflowing with joy, and He calls others to rejoice with Him.

We understand this plea. When we are overwhelmed with happiness we want to share our joy with everyone.

In this way the Lord describes Himself; in the midst of the grief which surrounded Him, His love and joy burst forth in the presence of the heavenly host.

He rejoiced! and because *He rejoiced...*“*Rejoice with me!*” ***We and heaven should rejoice too!***

APPLICATION:

This was the indirect correction the Pharisees and scribes were given. The 99, the 9, and the self-righteous son all lacked the wisdom of “*going after, searching diligently for, waiting and watching for the sinner who needs to be found.*”

We have to change our attitude and tactics if we are going to reach others for Christ – reach out – open up your homes – go to the homes of the lost – in the power and control of the Spirit but without the legalistic trappings of self-righteousness.

If you see yourself as the lost sheep, the lost coin or the lost son - The key ingredient that each lost object is called to demonstrate is **repentance**.

The Sheep regretted His wandering, the ***Coin*** His lostness and the ***Son*** his sinfulness. Jesus is the One who "receives sinners, restores them and rejoices over them with heaven; now and in the life to come."