

Lost Sheep and Lost Coin - the Lesson to Jewish Religious Authorities **A Series on the Reaction to Tax Collectors and Sinners: Part 1**

Among all of Jesus' parables, there are a few places where He presents a series of parables as a singular narrative unit (i.e. the unit comprised of three parables, the Two Sons, Wicked Tenants and the Wedding Guests, rebuke Jewish religious authorities). When a parable of a narrative unit is studied in isolation, one may not fully understand a particular parable without recognizing its purpose within the narrative unit.

Luke records a series of parables that Jesus intended as a literary unit in response to, not only the criticisms of Jewish religious authorities, but others as well who observed Him having a meal with tax collectors and other undesirable outcasts of society.

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)

In His first two parables, the Parable of the Lost Sheep and the Parable of the Lost Coin, Jesus challenges the attitudes of Jewish religious authorities towards sinners. The Parable of the Lost Sheep features a prominent figure in Jewish society, the shepherd and his true to life response to a lost sheep. Why do you have such low regard for sinners and not help them come to faith in God? Are those who comply to your law the righteous?

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)

When Jesus tells Jewish religious authorities this parable, he portrays them as shepherders (i.e. "what man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them"), and implies that they are not doing their job taking care of God's people; they are contemptuous of the people that Jesus is eating with and presume that they are not Believers.

The sheep in this parable are Old Testament Believers and this view finds its basis in a variety of biblical passages:

Seen as the people of Abraham:

But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the firstborn. He blessed Joseph, and said,

"The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, **the God who has been my shepherd** all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil,

Bless the lads;

And may my name live on in them,

And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;

And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." (Gen 48:14-16)

Seen as the covenant keeping Israelite:

Then Moses spoke to the Lord, saying, May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that **the congregation of the Lord will not be like sheep which have no shepherd.**" (Num 27:15-17)

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Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like **sheep without a shepherd**. (Matt 9:35-36)

These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; **but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel**. (Matt 10:5-6)

But Jewish religious authorities, failing to recognize the Messiah (God's mediator of the New Covenant), are incapable of shepherding because of their lack of faith. Jesus' conclusion to the parable places an emphasis on the joy of the shepherd when discovering one who repents and comes to faith, and the joy is also shared among other Believers. As heaven rejoices for every sinner who repents, Jesus associates repentance throughout the New Testament with the gospel to both Old Testament Believers and everyone else.

Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel**." (Mark 1:14-15; Matt 4:17)

And Levi gave a big reception for Him in his house; and there was a great crowd of tax collectors and other people who were reclining at the table with them. The Pharisees and their scribes began grumbling at His disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with the tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus answered and said to them, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but those who are sick. **I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance**." (Luke 5:29-32)

For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds." Then **He began to denounce the cities in which most of His miracles were done, because they did not repent**. (Matt 11:18-20)

The Parable of the Lost Sheep opens with the question, "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?" The negative attitudes of Jewish religious authorities answer Jesus' rhetorical question and incriminates them for their lack of agapē love, first to God for their failure to shepherd His people, and secondly to people for their failure to care and esteem sinners as their neighbor.

If Jewish religious authorities fail to recognize their role as shepherds of God's people, the second parable that immediately follows, the Parable of the Lost Coin, is a story that they could readily associate with; it is a story of one in possession of money:

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!' In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:8-10)

As all the tax collectors and the sinners sit around Jesus, this parable, directed at Jewish religious authorities, specifically draws upon their love for money. In essence, just as the woman passionately seeks her lost coin, Jewish religious authorities should love and seek the lost non-Believers.

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When Jesus concludes the Parable of the Lost Coin with “joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents,” He is drawing a parallel of the joy in finding the lost coin to the joy in heaven for each sinner who is brought to the Messiah.

In pairing the two parables, the Parable of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin, Jesus tells Jewish religious authorities that they have neglected their responsibility towards God and His people, and the object of their love is misplaced; tax collectors and the undesirables of society are the lost!! Despite Jesus’ efforts, Jewish religious leaders maintain their disbelief and fail to recognize that the kingdom of God is before them in the person of Jesus Christ.

If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (Matt 12:27-28)

Summary:

Parable	Primary Audience	Conclusion	Point
Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7)	Jewish religious authorities (Luke 15:2-3)	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)	Jewish religious authorities are not taking care of God's people, and rather than bring others to faith, they are contemptuous of non-Believers.
Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)		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)	
Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-24)			
Shrewd Manager (Luke 16:1-13):			
Rich Man, Poor Man (Luke 16:19-31)			