

Part of Jesus' ministry was public teaching.

He was talking about God and heaven, and he had a group of followers, we would call them his disciples. There were a couple of other groups that were listening to him as well. Religious leaders / teachers of the day, and there was this other crowd that was very unusual for a religious leader to attract.

Luke 15v1-

Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach.

These two phrases,

**"Tax Collectors and other notorious sinners
often came to listen..."**

are telling phrases.

-Tax Collectors / Sinners

-showed up often...not a one time deal.

They found something in His teaching that caused them to come back and listen.

This made the Pharisees and the teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such despicable people—even eating with them.

The fact that they were allowed around Him really bothered the religious leaders of the day.

In their opinion, these people didn't belong in the presence of religious people. The religious community was reserved for them and others like them.

So, here, we have Jesus pushing pause on His regular teaching, and he begins to share some illustrations to teach these religious leaders about **why** He spent time with these people.

So Jesus used this illustration:

If you had one hundred sheep, and one of them strayed away and was lost in the wilderness, wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine others to go and search for the lost one until you found it?

It would appear the answer was, "yes," and this was a very normal situation.

And then you would joyfully carry it home on your shoulders. When you arrived, you would call together your friends and neighbors to rejoice with you because your lost sheep was found.

In the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!

Or suppose a woman has ten valuable silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and look in every corner of the house and sweep every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her because she has found her lost coin.

In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.

In these stories, a sheep was lost, a coin was lost.

Something of value that was lost was searched for, sought out, and found. That find was celebrated because it brought joy to the finder.

In essence, Jesus is saying, "You wouldn't discard a sheep that strayed away, so I don't discard people that stray away."

In essence, Jesus is saying, "If you lost something valuable, you would search for it. I am searching for something valuable."

What He was really teaching them is how Heaven saw people...but they weren't getting it.

To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story:

"A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and took a trip to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money on wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him to feed his pigs. The boy became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looks good to him.

But no one gave him anything.

When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired men have food enough to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man."'

So he returned home to his father.

But this story was different on so many levels...

It is about the relationship of a son rejecting a father.

Unlike the sheep and the coin, this son didn't get lost. He left by his own will.

He left for his own reasons. It was intentional. It broke the father's heart.

To the listener, it was a clear picture of the selfishness of sin.

In this story there was no searching for what was lost...There was only waiting.

The Father loved the son enough to respect his decision to break relationship.

The son finds rock bottom and, "makes a decision," to return.

And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming.

I wonder what this son thought he would face?

I bet he expected to be rejected.

I bet he expected harshness.

I bet when the Father started running at him, his heart dropped.

Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to Him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'

But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger, and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening in the pen. We must

celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found. So the party began.

He didn't get what he expected. His return was welcomed, but not just welcomed...He was celebrated.

He wasn't scolded. He was restored. The hurt he had caused forgiven.

But the story goes on...Remember who this teaching was originally for?

The religious leaders who were complaining about the tax collectors and notorious sinners.

Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and asked one of the servants what was going on. "Your brother is back," he was told, "and your father has killed the calf we were fattening and has prepared a great feast. We are celebrating because of his safe return."

The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, "All these years I've worked hard for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet, when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate him by killing the finest calf we have."

His father said to him, "Look, dear son, you and I are very close, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!"

These religious leaders got the point. *They were the older brother.*

Jesus was teaching two groups at the same time...

For the teachers of religious law, He was teaching them about His Father's view of people.

Lost people weren't expendable.

They weren't too far gone to search for.

In fact, He was waiting.

He was longing for them.

And He invited His family join him in this view.

For the tax collector and notorious sinner, Jesus was teaching them about His Father's view of them.

They weren't expendable.

They had great value.

They were worth His searching out.

He longed for them.

So much so, that He was waiting for His moment...

The moment they would return, He would love them.

And when they returned, His family would celebrate them.

There are three groups that I want to address:

Jesus' crew...

There were some standing there listening that got it.

They had learned from Jesus who God was, and they, like Jesus, had learned to love people beautifully. They understood that people matter more than what they have done.

Perhaps, some of us in this room today are of that group.

We just love watching Jesus change people.

We live in the marketplace of Fort Collins with a beautiful addiction to seeing Him move, love, and revolutionize people. We pray for it, worship into it, and believe for the very best in everyone.

That group has caught the Father's vision and is living into it.

The 99, the...the older brother...the Religious.

Sometimes, in some of us, there are aspects of these..

We start to forget the beautiful grace the Father gave us, and we start to look at all that we have done for him. We start to believe sin deserves no grace.

Perhaps you are here today, and you need to hear the Father reminding you about His heart. You need a fresh invitation to love your workplace, your home, your city with this same contagious love that He has given you.

I love what the Father in the story did for the older brother...he just reminded him of the life they had the privilege of sharing together. I want to encourage you to reinvest in that face to face encounter with Him. He is our prize.

His Presence will always teach me about His love.

The sheep, the coin, the son

Maybe you are here, and like the sheep, you just got off course?

Or, maybe like the coin, someone trusted with your care failed?

Or maybe you are more like the son, and you just deliberately walked away.

Maybe you, like this boy, are ready to return home?

For you, Jesus is teaching you what to expect. A loving, tender Father who's waiting.

For those three groups, that same Father is here today, arms out, ready to love you where you are.

I don't know your story, but you do.

I do know my story...