

The Rejoice in Heaven (Luke 15:1-24)

We have been studying the gospel of Luke together. Today, we will study the first half of cp 15. The theme is “The Rejoice in Heaven.”

1. The joy of finding the lost

1-2

¹ Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

In the beginning of the previous chapter, Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?” The answer is obvious, but they wouldn’t answer.

Then there was a parable of the great banquet. Those who had been invited refused to come, and then those who wouldn’t be normally invited to such a great banquet were invited, and they sat at the table.

This chapter 15 starts when the Pharisees and experts in the law muttered at Jesus, “This man welcomes sinners, and even eats with them.” They criticized Jesus. In their eyes, he is doing something wrong.

They accurately observed what Jesus was doing, but they didn’t understand what he meant. Then Jesus told them parables.

4-7

⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷ 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.

A shepherd will go after a lost sheep until he finds it. Just as someone whose son or ox fell into a well would immediately pull him out, even on the

Sabbath day. Nobody would say to his son who is drowning, "I will teach you how to swim and climb. Climb up by yourself!" No, we wouldn't do that.

A shepherd will also rejoice if he finds a lost sheep. He will carry it on his shoulders and go home. Then he will call his friends and neighbors and they will rejoice together. Just as they would rejoice if their son or ox that fell in a well was rescued.

The lost sheep that was found will be returned to the flock. If someone who went away from God returns, he or she will be again welcomed into the fellowship of God's people. The whole flock will rejoice with heaven. There will be great rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents and comes back to God. So why are you not happy about that, Pharisees?

8-10

⁸ "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' ¹⁰ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

When a woman notices that she lost one coin, she will search for it. She knows that it is surely somewhere in the house. She will not give up after searching for a little while, for she knows that it is surely in the house. She will never give up, but search carefully everywhere in the house.

All the coins of the same kind have the same value. It will not lose its value nor decrease in value when it is lost. They still have the same value. A man is precious before God, even though he or she is a sinner. God doesn't want to leave the person lost.

And when the coin is found, she will rejoice over it. She cannot keep the joy to herself. It is a great joy which she wants to let everyone know.

Now that it was found, it doesn't matter why it was lost. And how it has been lost doesn't affect its value. Whether it was among the rotten fish in the rubbish bin, or it was among rusty nails in the garden, or it was among rings and earrings in the jewel box, it doesn't change the value of the coin. Now that it was found, the coin is in her hand. She found the coin again. And she rejoices over it.

In the same way, if their son or ox falls into a well, even if it is on the

Sabbath day, they will immediately pull him out. We cannot leave him, as he falls in front of our eyes. And when he is rescued, we will be overjoyed! We will not complain that he is wet or dirty. We will be just happy that he was rescued. In the same way, or even more, when one sinner repents and turns back to God, there will be great rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God. So, why are you upset about it, the teachers of the law?

These two parables show very well how much God is interested in one person. A person is so precious that God cannot help searching and finding the person. Faith is to notice, "God loves me so much that He will search till he finds me." Faith is to know and accept our worth as a person God cannot help searching. Faith is to realize "God will rejoice over my turning back to Him." And faith is to know "it is not just true for me, but God has the same passion and love for everyone."

2. The accepted son by his return

11-24

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'

²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. "But 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. ²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your

son. ' ²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

From here, we can learn several things about basic relationship between God and man.

First of all, God respects man's free will.

The younger son asked his father to him his share of the estate. Then, not long after receiving his share, he got together all he had, left his father and set off for a distant country. He thought finally he is free! Now he can use his time and money as he likes without anyone telling him what to do. It is difficult to earn money, but it is easy to spend money. And much more easy to spend it, if the money is given without any effort. He just continued to spend the money as he liked.

When God created Man, he gave him free will. Man can choose to leave or be with God. He can choose to do good or bad. Man is not a robot that moves as programmed by God. Let's look at some verses.

Gen. 1:29

²⁹ Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.

Gen. 2:16-17

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden." Man was given freedom and he could choose what to do by his own will.

Gen. 3:9-10

⁹ But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" ¹⁰ He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Man can choose to hide from God. Man can respond to God by his free will.

Gen. 6:5

⁵ The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

Man can act according to his thoughts and his will. God usually doesn't stop it by force even though the act is evil. God created Man to be a person with free will.

Secondly, Man has to be responsible for his choice.

The younger son could use his money as he liked. And as a result, he went broke. And it is he who suffers the consequence.

When he went broke, there was a severe famine in that whole country. And he began to be in need. He couldn't even find enough food to eat. He somehow found a place to stay. At least he was not a homeless. But now that there was a famine and everyone was in need, there wasn't a chance to get a decent job. Besides, he didn't have much skills or experiences. And moreover, nobody trusted a person like him, who squandered all his inherited property in such a short time. The job he finally found was to feed pigs. That was the kind of job nobody wanted to do. He was so hungry that he even longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating.

Now he cannot blame anyone for this situation. It is wrong to blame his father and say, "It is because the money you gave me was too little." And it will be too selfish to blame other people and say, "Why nobody helps me? I am in such a trouble!" Of course, he cannot blame God and say, "Why did the famine happen, when I had no money?" It is just like saying, "Why does it rain, when I have no umbrella?"

He is in this situation as a result of all the choices he had made. He is responsible for his choices.

God respects Man's free will. If a man chooses to sin, God allows him to follow his will. But it doesn't mean God allows man to do whatever he wants

without giving him any instructions or knowledge. Let's look at this verse one more time.

Gen. 2:16-17

¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."

God showed the blessings as a result of righteous acts and the consequences of sins through His Word. Then He allows man to choose freely. (cf. Duet 28:46-48, 29:9, 30:19)

Man can choose freely. And he is responsible for his choice.

Thirdly, God welcomes anyone who comes back to Him.

When the younger son came to his senses, he decided to go back to his father. His father welcomed him, though he went totally broke and was in his worst state. He received him as his son, not as his hired man. For the father, no matter how terrible state his son fell into or no matter how badly he wasted his wealth, he is still his son. This fact never changes. The father treasured his lost son more than his lost estate. The father never forced his son to come back. But the son chose to come back. The fact that he chose to come back to him, was enough for his father to welcome him.

Jesus welcomes people who come to him. Even though they may be sinners, if they realize their need for him and come to him, Jesus welcomes them, receives them gladly. Even though they may be excluded by the society, if they come to Jesus, he will add them into fellowship in the kingdom of God.

Fourthly, we can learn about blessings of returning to the father.

Let's think about how he felt in the severe famine. If you were him, what would you pray? "Oh God. Please help me to have a good job. Please give enough food. Please give me friends who can help me."

Things didn't go the way he hoped, but all his prayers were answered, because he came back to his father.

Eph. 2:4-5

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved.

By the cross of Jesus, we are redeemed, reconciled with God, and through faith, enter into peace with God, into the loving relationship with God as his children.

God, in his grace, will welcome anyone who comes back to him, no matter how bad his past or his current state is. He will receive him, not as a criminal to be judged or a hired man, but as his dear child.

3. The rejoice in heaven

We can study the latter part of this parable next time. But now let's review the beginning of this chapter. Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered against Jesus, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

They accurately observed what Jesus was doing, but they didn't understand what he meant. So Jesus gave them parables. The parable of a shepherd who rejoices when he found one lost sheep. Then, the parable of a woman who carefully searches one lost coin all over the house, and rejoices over it when she finds it. And finally, the parable of a father who welcomes the prodigal son who lost everything and finally returned to the father.

There will be a great rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents and comes back to God. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law couldn't understand this. But just because they couldn't understand this, it doesn't mean there will not be a great rejoicing in heaven.

When you repented and decided to leave sin and came back to God, there may have been some people who persecuted you or complained about you. But they cannot cancel the great rejoicing in heaven. When one sinner repents and comes back to God, there will be a great rejoicing in heaven.

Jesus said, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. (Luke 19:10)" The Pharisees and teachers of the law couldn't understand this.

But just because they couldn't understand this, it doesn't mean Jesus' mission and call are wrong. When we receive the Holy Spirit, and live as Jesus' disciple and a witness for his resurrection, some people may oppose us, or attack us. But it doesn't cancel the great rejoicing in heaven. When one sinner repents and comes back to God, there will be a great rejoicing in heaven.

The Pharisees and teachers of the law couldn't understand how precious one person is in the eyes of God. Just because they can't understand this, we cannot conclude that God is actually not interested in one person, nor should we deny His word, "You are precious in my eyes."

Sometimes you may be disappointed about yourself. You may feel you can't believe that God loves you as you are. But my dear friends, please remember this. The truth is God loves you. God still loves us when we are weak, while we are sinning, even when we oppose him. (Rom 5:6-10) You cannot change this.

God, in his grace, will welcome anyone who comes back to him, no matter how bad his past or his current state is. He will receive him, not as a criminal to be judged or a hired man, but as his dear child. There will be a great rejoicing in heaven because of you.