

Luke 15
Grumbling and Rejoicing

Have you ever *lost* something you *really valued* and then found it?.... Losing something like that is a *terrible feeling, isn't it?*... But then, the *joy* you feel once you find it can be *so great* that it can *even surpass* that *anxiety* you felt when you realized it was lost, *can't it?*

I remember this one time.... Yvonne and I were living in Boston.... And we were at this mall. I was looking at things in Best Buy and Yvonne said she wanted to go look for some stuff at Kohl's.

So, she went to Kohl's while I stayed in Best Buy. But after a while, she didn't come back. I didn't have my cell phone on me, so I couldn't call her. So, I got tired of standing around and figured I'd walk over to Kohl's and try to find her.

I looked all over the place in Kohl's. I walked all through the mall. And she was nowhere to be found. About an hour passed.

And, what starts going through my mind?... *Fear*. "*This isn't right. What could've happened? Surely nobody looks for clothes this long!*" After a while longer, I went to mall security and they started looking for her, too.

Eventually—I don't even know how long it was—but *eventually* as I was back waiting again at Best Buy, *I saw her*. And *immediately, joy, relief*, all kinds of emotions as I walked as fast as I could towards her.

Now, *picture* this scene. And *imagine* somebody standing by watching this unfold starts saying, "*O come on, man! Get a grip! She's just a girl. You could easily find another one!*" What do you think I'd do?.....

For somebody to say something like that would be *nonsense, right?* Because that person has *absolutely no idea just how much* I value my wife!.... To me, she's not just another woman. She's my *beloved wife!*

1. The Grumbling of the Pharisees and the First Two Parables (vv. 1-10)

Well, that's something like what we see going on in our passage this morning in Luke 15.

Because, up to this point in Luke's Gospel, Jesus has been *seeking out* those who are lost—the people who've wandered away from God.

But *not everybody* was happy about this. Look at the *first 2 verses* of Luke 15:

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Now, Luke, *of course*, has made it very clear throughout his Gospel that Jesus is the Son of God. And *what* are the Pharisees doing here?

Well, they're doing just what the Israelites did after the Exodus out of Egypt that we read earlier from Exodus 16. They saw something the Lord did, and they *start grumbling* about it.

"He's eating with sinners!... Totally unacceptable!... What's he doing?... Why would he ever care about those people? They're sinners!"

So... *they complained*. *"If he really was who he says he is then he'd never eat with these people."*.... And each of these 3 parables Jesus tells in the rest of the chapter is a *direct response* to their grumbling.

The first two actually make the very same point. And Jesus concludes them both in the *same way*. The conclusion of the Parable of the Lost Sheep, V. 7:

"I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

And v. 10, *after* the Parable of the Lost Coin, summarizes the same point: *"I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*.....

In each of these parables, somebody loses something and then finds it. *Say* a shepherd has 100 sheep, and one goes astray. The shepherd will *leave* the 99 and *go after* the one. And then, when he finds it, he'll call on his neighbors and friends to *rejoice* with him..... *Celebration!*

In the same way, *say* there's a woman who has *10 pieces of silver*. She loses one and starts looking for it all over her house. When she finds it,

she'll also call on her friends and neighbors to *rejoice* with her because she found her lost coin.

Now, *how* do these parables relate to the *grumbling* of the Pharisees?..... Well, because the tax collectors and sinners Jesus is eating with are the *lost sheep*. They are the *lost coin*.

In other words, they *may seem* insignificant to an outsider—1 out of 100 *sheep*; 1 out of 10 *silver coins*—but they have *much value* to the one who lost them.

And, the Pharisees and Scribes *assumed* these tax collectors and sinners were *unclean*. And you *shouldn't eat* with them because *eating* with somebody indicated that you in some way *identified* with them.

And so, they thought that by eating with them, *Jesus was identifying* with these sinners. And they *couldn't stand* it.....

But, *here's the thing.... that's the very point....* Because by eating with sinners, *Jesus was identifying* with them.... *Jesus identifies* with sinners.

In fact, that's the *very reason* he came. *He came to seek us out....* And so, Jesus eating with sinners is actually a *beautiful picture* of the gospel.

Because he *identifies* with you and me..... No, he doesn't at all *approve* of the sinful things we do..... But *he is* the one who came to *take away* our sins by taking them upon himself and *nailing* them to the cross, *so that* we might feast with him in his Kingdom.

And so, *instead of grumbling*, these *Pharisees* and *Scribes* should get with the program and *rejoice*! Because, Jesus the Good Shepherd is seeking and saving the lost. And *because of this*, there's *much rejoicing* in heaven!

Think about that.... God and his holy angels *rejoice* over *one sinner* who repents.... They *rejoiced* when *you repented*.... They *still rejoice* when you *repent*. When you turn from your sins and back to God.

So, *how much more* ought we to rejoice over *other sinners* who repent?!.... Don't *stand by* the sidelines and grumble. But *rejoice* in what God is doing in bringing sinners into his Kingdom.

And the Pharisees and Scribes missed all this because they assumed that *if* God visited his people it would be *because they are righteous*.

And so, *instead of humbling themselves* and repenting, and rejoicing when others repented, they *grumbled* in their pride. And *rather than turning* to Christ for mercy and healing, they kept *justifying themselves*.

And because they *justified themselves*, they *condemned* the only one who was *truly without sin*—Jesus the *spotless* Son of God.

2. The Parable of the Two Sons (vv.11-32)

And *Jesus knows exactly* what's in their hearts. So, he continues on with yet another parable in verses 11-32.

Now, we can break this last parable into four sections—1. The younger Son's rebellion (11-16), 2. His return (17-19), 3. The Father's response (20-24), 4. Older Son's response (25-32).....

Let's focus in on the *first section* is verses 11-16:

There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

Now, think of this against the backdrop of Israel after the Exodus. *They wanted God's gifts but not God himself, right?.. They made demands.* And *God gave* them what they wanted. But they still went their own way.

And so, this son asks for his share of the inheritance. And he goes his own way and *squanders* everything he had. And when a famine comes, he starts working for this Gentile feeding pigs.

And he *even longed* to eat the pigs' food. But he *couldn't even get* that..... For a *first century Jew* this is about as low as you could go.

Leaving his Father's house has left him *completely empty* and *ashamed*..... And when you look at this younger son, you see the story of the human race, *don't you?*

Look at this son, and you see Adam and Eve *disobeying* God and hiding in shame. You see Israel in the wilderness. You see the nations rebelling against their Creator.... Look at this son, and you see *yourself*.

You see, sometimes the Lord will give you over to what you want. And he'll let you have it.... And he'll let you do it.... Until you *taste* the *real bitterness* of life apart from him.

And *that's just* what happens with this younger son, *isn't it?* In verses 17-19, he *comes to his senses* and he says:

How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.

He realizes now where he *really is*. And he *humbles himself*. He doesn't say he's going to go back making demands.... No. He *assumes* he's unworthy to be considered a son. And so, he figures his *only shot* is to ask his Father to be a hired servant. And so, he returns to his Father.

And then we see the Father's love for this son in verses 20-24: And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and

celebrate.²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

Look at this response! This is *shocking* on a number of levels. First, the Father sees the son a long way off. I'd suggest to you that he was *watching* for him to return. *Hoping* that his son would come to his senses.

Then, when he sees him he's *filled with compassion*. Not, "Oh no, what does he want now? Let me go see what this is about." But, "There's my son!... My son!... I love him so much!... How I've longed to see him!"

And then, he throws caution to the wind and starts *running* with all his might.... I mean, *picture* this *old guy* running through the *village* with his *long robes!*.... And before the son has a chance to *say anything*, he throws his arms around him and kisses him.

The son says he's *not worthy*. And he was right.... But *what does the Father do?*.... He clothes him in his best robe, puts a ring on his finger, puts sandals on his feet, kills the fattened calf, throws a *huge celebration*. "My son was dead but he's alive again. He was lost but now he's found!"

This is a *picture* of that *rejoicing in heaven* that Jesus talked about in those first two parables that happens *whenever one sinner* repents!

Now, it's easy to assume at this point that the return of this son and his acceptance by the Father is the main point of the story.

And, *for sure*, that's beautiful and it's *really important*. But *it's not really the main point*. Because, *remember*, Jesus is *still responding* here to the grumbling of the Pharisees.

And so, in verses 25-32, we see what he's really been driving at—the response of the *older brother*:

Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served

you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!"³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.'³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found."

This older son is *so oblivious* to what's going on—*so disconnected* with his Father—that he *doesn't even know* what happened until he hears the music and dancing.

And why?.... Because he was so caught up in *working for* his Father that he had *no idea* what was *really important* to his Father. And so, he gets *angry* and *refuses* to celebrate the return of his brother.

I mean, look at what he says to his Father: "*these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.*"

See, it's all about *service* and *obedience*. And *actually*, the NIV isn't wrong when it translates "*I have served you*" as "*I've slaved for you.*"

Because, *ironically*, while the *younger son* wanted to return and be a slave, this *older son* talks about his position in his Father's house *as though* he was a slave. "*I've been serving you... slaving for you.... And I haven't disobeyed you.*"

"*So, I obviously deserve the fattened calf before that son of yours.*" No thankfulness..... It's *all about what* he's done and *what* he thinks he *deserves*.

And we're *almost tempted* to sympathize with him, *aren't we?* Because *how often* do we look at *our relationship* to God in *just that way?* "*Lord, look at everything I've done for you! I deserve better than this!... And I definitely at least deserve more than Jack or Sandy over there!*"

But see, *that's* the *exact way* the Pharisees saw *their relationship* to God, *isn't it?.....* "*We do the right things. So, we deserve to be blessed. And*

if Jesus really was on the side of righteousness, then he'd only want to eat with us, not with those sinners."

So, *just like* the Pharisees, this *older brother* gets mad and he *complains* when he sees the Father welcoming and celebrating and eating with the younger brother.

In other words, this older brother *is* the Pharisees and Scribes standing by watching Jesus feast and celebrate with sinners and tax collectors, and grumbling about it.

They *didn't see brothers and sisters*. They saw *only sinners*. And Jesus essentially says in this parable, "*You're upset that I'm eating with these people. But, it's actually a lot worse than that. When they turn from their sins, the angels in heaven rejoice.*

I and my Father receive them as children of the Kingdom. We run to them. We kiss them. We welcome them. We clean them. We clothe them. And we feed them with the best things of our house!

And you're angry... Why?... Because I'm welcoming my children who've come back to me?"

"Don't be angry.... Rejoice that these brothers and sisters of yours are turning from their sins. And embrace them in love. Or else you might become the one who runs off and squanders my gifts!

Worse than that, you'll turn against me and murder me, if you don't get on board and rejoice in what I'm doing."

And Jesus doesn't tell us *how* the older brother responds to the words of his Father, *does he?...* And that's *very intentional*. Because He wants his people to *put themselves* in the place of the older brother.

And he's saying, "*This story isn't closed. There's still time for you to repent of your pride and self-righteousness and rejoice in what I'm doing.... So, what will you do?"*

3. The Good Older Brother

Now, this whole story is very much tied up in what Jesus said at the end of the previous chapter about the *cost of discipleship*. There he told the crowds that being his disciple means forsaking all *earthly ties* and taking up the cross to follow him.

In other words, you *must consider* the ideals of Christ and his Kingdom *superior over* the ideals of your society. Because Jesus *reconfigures* your identity.

He *reconfigures whom* you identify with and *who* your family is.... And so, *your family is now anybody* who repents of their sins and turns to Christ for forgiveness.

And because of that, *if you're a baptized member of the church, then you are now in the position* of the older brother in Jesus' parable.

And now, as the *older brother, how do you look at other people?....* You *come* to church every week. You're *active* and involved in the ministry of God's Kingdom. You're *busy* in the field working for your Father..... *That's all Great!*

But, *what's your attitude* toward those who've squandered time and resources on themselves? *Do you* look at them with *disdain?* Or *with compassion?*

And *if they turn to Christ and receive the joy of acceptance with God, do you receive them* as your own brother or sister?... *Do you look at them the way you want to see them?....* Or do you *look at them the way your Father sees them?*

Have you grown up in the church?.... Do you not know a day when you haven't followed Christ as your Lord? Then *that's a wonderful thing. Praise God!!....* But, *know for certain* that the *only reason* for that is *his grace* to you.

And the *grace* that has *kept* you a Christian all your life is the *same grace* that *seeks out* and *saves* the straying sinner and brings him to repentance and cleanses him from the inside out.

And Jesus wants us to ask ourselves here, “*Are we doing the work of seeking and loving the lost?... Are we being good older brothers? Are we willing to do the dirty work of associating with those our society considers untouchable?.... Are we rejoicing over the sinners who repent?*”

Let’s look at it from a *different angle*.... Say one of us here today goes astray.... Commits some grievous sin.... Walks away from the church.... *How do we respond? Would we leave the 99 to go after the one?*

And *what if* they did eventually repent and come back? *How would they be treated?... Would there be grumbling and complaining?... Would they be a second class citizen?... Or would you truly rejoice and receive them back in the love of Christ?*

Or do we think we’re the *privileged children* who deserve better?.... *If we do, then we need to look to Jesus. And we need to see what we really are apart from his mercy.*

Because, The *good older brother* is the one who goes and *seeks out* his younger brother in the *far away country*, *finds* him in the *pig sty*, *pulls* him out of the *mud*, cleans him up, and *brings* him back to his Father's house.

And that, *brothers and sisters*, is *exactly* what Jesus, *our older brother*, has done for *each and every one of us*..... And it's what he now calls us to do for others.

Because *Jesus* left his Father’s house. *He humbled himself and stepped down* from his *heavenly glory*.... And he went to a *far away country* in order to *identify* with sinners.

And he *entered into* the *pig sty* of *our sin and misery* not *because* he *squandered* what he had on luxurious living. But *because we squandered* God’s goodness to us. And we were left empty and without hope.

And he *didn’t consider* equality with God a *thing* to be held onto. But he *humbled himself*. He *took* the form of a servant, and *became* obedient even to the point of *death* on a cross.

He *took our place* in his *life*, his *suffering*, and his *death*. And though *he was dead, he is alive*. And *he now carries us* to the Father, who runs to us *rejoicing* and *embraces us* in love because of what Jesus, *our older brother*, has done for us.

See, *brothers and sisters, by nature we* are only children of wrath (Eph. 2). But Jesus is God's one and only true Son who owns all that the Father has. And he *freely gives* that inheritance to all who repent of their sins and turn to him.

And when *that happens*, the angels in heaven rejoice. *God himself rejoices*. And he *clothes you*. He *cleans you*. And *he feeds you* with the good things of his house.

And *because* of what he's done for us in making us his children by pure grace, he now calls us to *go out* and *seek out* others who've strayed far from home.

So then, *brothers and sisters, let us not* stand on the sidelines and grumble. But *let us* be concerned with what *our Father* thinks is important. And that is *seeking* and *saving* those who are lost. And *rejoicing* when they're found.