

Luke 15:1-10 – "The Joy of Finding the Lost"

1 All the tax collectors and sinners were approaching to listen to him. **2** And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." **3** So he told them this parable: **4** "What man among you, who has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open field and go after the lost one until he finds it? **5** When he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders, **6** and coming home, he calls his friends and neighbors together, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!' **7** I tell you, in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who don't need repentance." **8** "Or what woman who has ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? **9** When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found the silver coin I lost!' **10** I tell you, in the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who repents."

Key Background:

- **Tax Collectors and Sinners:** Tax collectors were Jews who worked for Rome, collecting taxes from their own people and often charging extra for personal profit. They were considered traitors and were grouped with "sinners" - people who openly violated Jewish religious and moral standards. Both groups were socially ostracized and banned from synagogue worship.
- **Pharisees and Scribes:** Religious leaders who prided themselves on strict observance of the Law and ritual purity. They believed that association with sinners would make them ceremonially unclean, and eating with such people was especially scandalous as it implied acceptance and fellowship.
- **Shepherd's Care:** In Palestinian culture, shepherds were responsible for every sheep in their flock. Losing even one sheep was a serious matter, both economically and in terms of the shepherd's reputation. Shepherds would risk their lives to find lost sheep, as the terrain was dangerous with cliffs, wild animals, and robbers.
- **Ten Silver Coins:** The woman likely had ten drachmas (Greek silver coins), possibly part of her wedding dowry or life savings. For a poor family, losing one-tenth of their wealth was devastating. The coins may have been strung together as a headdress, making the loss of one particularly distressing.
- **Cultural Celebration:** In both parables, the finder calls friends and neighbors to celebrate. This was customary in Middle Eastern culture - significant events, whether joyful or sorrowful, were shared with the community. The cost of celebration might even exceed the value of what was found, emphasizing the disproportionate joy.

- **Heaven's Perspective:** Jesus contrasts earthly religious attitudes with heaven's values. While the Pharisees complained about Jesus's association with sinners, heaven rejoices when the lost are found.

Questions from the Story:

- Who was approaching to listen to Jesus (v. 1)? What does this tell us about who Jesus attracted and welcomed?
- What were the Pharisees and scribes complaining about (v. 2)? What does their complaint reveal about their hearts toward those they considered sinners?
- In the parable of the lost sheep, what does the shepherd do when he realizes one sheep is missing (v. 4)? What does this show about God's heart for the lost?
- How does the shepherd react when he finds the lost sheep (v. 5)? What does this tell us about God's joy when the lost are found?
- What does the shepherd do when he returns home with the found sheep (v. 6)? Why does he call others to celebrate with him?
- According to Jesus, how does heaven respond to one sinner who repents compared to ninety-nine righteous people who don't need repentance (v. 7)? What does this reveal about God's priorities?
- In the parable of the lost coin, how thoroughly does the woman search for her lost coin (v. 8)? What does this show about how earnestly God seeks the lost?
- What does the woman do when she finds her lost coin (v. 9)? How does this parallel the shepherd's response and what does it teach about celebration in God's kingdom?
- According to Jesus, who rejoices when one sinner repents (v. 10)? What does this tell us about the importance of each individual to God?
- How do these parables challenge the Pharisees' attitude toward tax collectors and sinners? What do they reveal about God's heart versus religious pride?
- What do both parables teach us about the value God places on every individual, regardless of their past or reputation?
- How should these parables shape our attitude toward those who are far from God? What does it mean for us to share in God's joy when the lost are found?
- If God searches so diligently for the lost and celebrates so joyfully when they're found, how should this affect our own evangelistic efforts and heart for the lost?