

Study 4

Seeking the Lost

Luke 15

The confronting thing about Jesus is that he hangs around with all the wrong people. Instead of coming to spend time with the impressive and the religious and the best and brightest of Israel, Jesus seems to do exactly the opposite.

Group Discussion

Think back over the past week. Who have you been spending your time with?

As we set out to look at a group of three of the most famous parables Jesus ever told, notice the context set by Luke 15:1-2. "Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "**This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.**"

Tax Collectors – while wealthy – were shunned by the Jews because of their co-operation with the Roman empire, which ruled over Israel by force. The term "Sinners" included all other kinds of disreputable types who clean living Pharisees would do their best to avoid. Jesus did the exact opposite!

- a) Look back to Luke 5:27-32. Jesus has already been in trouble for exactly the same thing. What was his response the first time?

Background Briefing

It's that 'reversal thing' again!

Remember back in Luke 1? Mary, when she was told she would give birth to God's son, sang a song that summed up everything that Jesus was going to do. Look back at some of her words...

⁵⁰His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.

⁵¹He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has **scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.**

⁵²He has brought down rulers from their thrones

but has lifted up the humble.

⁵³He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful

⁵⁵to Abraham and his descendants forever,
even as he said to our fathers."

As we read Luke's gospel we've got to watch out for anyone who's **proud in their inmost thoughts!**

Lost and Found...

Read the two parables from **verse 3 to 10**.

- b) What do the two stories have in common?

- c) How is God different to the Pharisees who are complaining?

Of course, the 'ninety-nine righteous persons' Jesus speaks of are the Pharisees, who in their own minds have nothing to repent of. The reality couldn't be further from the truth, because we know that they're proud in their inmost thoughts! That's the problem with anyone who doesn't think they need to repent!

Think about it...

Do we celebrate the same thing God celebrates?

Are we as a church prepared to 'leave the ninety-nine in the open country' and look for lost sheep? How can we do this more effectively?

The Lost and Found Sons

Now read the third parable... the story of the lost son. Or is it actually a story of TWO lost sons? Read from verse 11 to 32.

- a) By the end of the story, which of the two sons is alienated from the father?

- b) In the context of what's happening in Luke's gospel, who do the two sons represent?

- c) What lessons are there for us in the parable?

- d) What does genuine **repentance** look like?

- e) What do we learn of God's nature from the parable?

Part of a Bigger Picture

Hundreds of years before Jesus, the prophet Jeremiah looked at a smashed and desolate Israel, with the people scattered far from their land. This was "the exile" – a crisis in Israel's history that the nation never truly recovered from. Even now in the time of Jesus that there's a population back in the land, they live under harsh foreign rule, and there are still exiled Jewish communities spread all around Asia Minor and beyond.

Read Jeremiah 31:17-20. ("Ephraim" is one of the original tribal names for Israel.)

- f) What hope did Jeremiah hold out for Israel's restoration?

- g) What similarities can you see Jesus drawing on as he tells the parable of the runaway son?

This great regathering of Israel was foreshadowed as far back as Deuteronomy. When Israel repented, the nation would be restored, and God would 'circumcise their hearts' by pouring out his Spirit on them. In that way he would "write his law in their hearts" so they could serve him as they should. In summary, Jesus is saying that this great time the prophets had promised **had now come**. That's what Mary was celebrating in her song. But rather than celebrating the return of their repenting lost and desolate and broken brothers as they should, the Pharisees are complaining. And because of that, they'll be shut out from the celebrations. It's their choice!

Confronting Jesus

The confronting thing about these parables is that Jesus is saying there are only two kinds of people... **those who need to humbly repent** and be welcomed in to God's celebration, and **those who think they don't need to repent**... and miss out.

Which kind of people do we most resemble at mpc?

Which kind of person are you?

Pray together as a group that we would be truly humble and repentant, and not 'proud in our inmost thoughts'.