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The Parables of Jesus Christ: The Missing Sheep, the Misplaced Silver, and the Miserable Son

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THE PARABLES OF JESUS CHRIST

PARABLE THIRTY-ONE: The Missing Sheep, The Misplaced Silver, and The Miserable Son (Lk. 15:1-32)

SURVEY

- This is, in reality, a three-fold parable.
 1. A shepherd, having a hundred sheep, seeks and finds one that has strayed from the fold.
 2. A woman, having ten coins, seeks and finds a misplaced one.
 3. A father, having two sons, waits for and welcomes back a returning wayward one.
- There is great rejoicing on each occasion following the recovery of the sheep and coin, and the return of the son.

SIGNIFICANCE

- This is Jesus' most lengthy parable.
- It features the word *rejoicing* more than any other parable.
- It is the only parable that seems to highlight the role of the entire Trinity in the work of salvation.

SPIRITUAL TRUTHS

- Observations regarding the first part of the parable—the missing sheep. J. Dwight Pentecost writes:

"In introducing the first parable—that of the searching shepherd—Christ did not begin, as was often His custom in parables, by referring to a certain man, which would have made the parable impersonal; instead, He personalized the parable by saying, '*Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them*' (Lk. 15:4). In this way the Lord caused each of His hearers to immediately take personal interest in what was of value to the one who had suffered a loss. Further, Christ's opening statement caused His listeners to evaluate their own responses to such a situation. The Lord knew that because of the value of what had been lost, any of these hearers would have left the ninety-nine to go seek the lost sheep. The search would not have been casual or of short duration; rather, it would have been diligent and would have extended until the valuable lost sheep was found. The

search would have been initiated and pursued because of the value placed on what the owner had lost.

When the searcher in the parable had found the lost sheep, he showed his compassion for the animal by putting it on his shoulder and carrying it home. Then at his return he summoned his friends and neighbors to share his joy. The restoration of what was of value to him brought such joy to him that he called others to share in his rejoicing. Christ thus taught that when one is lost, God the Father searches persistently and diligently for that lost one and finds sufficient joy in the restoration of that lost one to summon others to share His joy. Lest the Pharisees miss the point, Christ explained, '*There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*' (Lk 15:7). Christ was not inferring that the Pharisees, represented by the ninety-nine, were righteous in God's sight. They were righteous in their own sight, and they counted themselves as needing no repentance. The sinner who repented brought joy to God, not the self righteous Pharisee who rejected Christ's invitation to repentance."

(*The Parables of Jesus*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan. 1982. pp. 100, 101)

Perhaps the most graphic and glorious song ever composed regarding this seeking shepherd is Elisabeth Clephane's great musical masterpiece, *The Ninety and Nine*:

*There were ninety and nine that safely lay
In the shelter of the fold.
But one was out on the hills away,
Far off from the gates of gold,
Away on the mountains wild and bare.
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.
Away from the tender Shepherd's care.*

*"Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine;
Are they not enough for Thee?"
"This of mine has wandered away from Me;
And although the road be rough and steep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep,
I go to the desert to find My sheep. "*

*But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed thro'
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.*

*Out in the desert He heard its cry,
Sick and helpless, and ready to die;
Sick and helpless, and ready to die.*

*"Lord, whence are those blood drops all the way
That mark out the mountains track?"*

*"They were shed for one who had gone astray
Ere the Shepherd could bring him back."*

"Lord whence are thy hands so rent and torn?"

*"They're pierced tonight by many a thorn;
They're pierced tonight by many a thorn."*

*But all thro' the mountains, thunder riv'n,
And up from the rocky steep,*

*There arose a glad cry to the gate of heav'n,
"Rejoice! I have found my sheep!"*

*And the angels echoed around the throne;
"Rejoice for the Lord brings back His own!
Rejoice for the Lord brings back His own!"*

- Observations regarding the second part of the parable—the misplaced silver coin. Again, consider the words of J. Dwight Pentecost:

"To teach the lesson a second time, Christ used the figure of a woman who had ten silver coins. The coins may have been the bride's dowry that she had been given at her wedding. Such coins were normally mounted on a headband and were worn on the forehead to be publicly seen. The loss of one of the coins would suggest unfaithfulness on the part of the bride to her husband. The coins not only had a monetary value but an emotional value as well, for they signified the bond between the bride and the bridegroom and the faithfulness that such a bond entailed.

In the parable of the lost coin the woman began searching for the coin in her home. Palestinian homes had either a dirt floor or a stone floor. In order to keep down the dust, or to overcome the cold and dampness, the floors would be covered with straw. In order to find a coin that had fallen to the floor, it would be necessary to remove the straw, sift through it, and then sweep the floor. Such a search involved considerable labor, but the coin was of sufficient value that the labor was considered worthwhile. The woman did not shrink from the labor because of the work involved; instead, she searched diligently through the straw until the coin was found. When she was rewarded for her diligent labor by the discovery of the coin, she experienced such joy that she could not contain it within herself; hence she called her friends and neighbors and invited them to rejoice with her. Once

again, Christ, through this parable, revealed that God diligently seeks sinners regardless of the labor involved. When a sinner repents and is restored to God, He rejoices in the sinners restoration and summons the angels in heaven to join Him in rejoicing over *'one sinner who repents'*" (Lk. 15: 10).

- Observations regarding the third part of the parable—the miserable son.

The account here concerns a father who has two sons. The following outline will prove helpful:

- The younger son (Lk. 15:11-24)

His rebellion

1. The foolishness he exhibits (Lk. 15:11-13)

- a. In seeking his inheritance (Lk. 15:11-12): Soon he has wasted his share of his father's estate.
- b. In squandering his inheritance (Lk. 15:13): Soon he has wasted all his money in wild living and finds himself penniless in a foreign country.

2. The famine he endures (Lk. 15:14-16)

Eventually he is forced to eat the food of the pigs he feeds.

His return

1. The realization of the younger son

"And when he came to himself, he said, how many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" (Lk. 15:17)

2. The repentance of the younger son

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (Lk. 15:18-19).

- a. This boy is one of at least eight individuals in the Bible to utter those three difficult words, "I have sinned." The others were:

- (1) Pharaoh (Ex. 9:27; 10:16)
- (2) Balaam (Num. 22:34)
- (3) Achan (Josh. 7:20)
- (4) Saul (1 Sam. 26:21)
- (5) David (2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10)
- (6) Job (Job 7:20)
- (7) Judas (Mt. 27:4)

b. As the context indicates, however, only three of these were genuinely sorrowful for their sin. These were: David, Job, and the prodigal son.

3. The receiving of the younger son

"And he arose, and came to his father, But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry" (Lk. 15:20-24).

- A final quote from Dr. Pentecost is helpful at this point:

The narrative states, *'while he was still a long way off, his father saw him'* (Lk. 15:20). The original Greek puts the emphasis on the words 'a long way off', indicating that the father did not remain in his house hoping the son would return. Instead, the father expected the son to return, and so each day the father evidently traveled a considerable distance from the house to a vantage point where he could discern the son's return at the earliest possible moment. Thus this father eagerly anticipated the return of his son.

When the father saw his son, he *'was filled with compassion for him'* (Lk. 15:20). The father's love did not begin with the son's return. The father had never ceased to love his son. He loved his son even when the son was worthy of no love. He loved the son even when the son was estranged from him. He loved the son even when the son was squandering his inheritance in wild living. He loved the son even when the son had stooped to become a swineherd. He loved the son when the son was unworthy of any love. The father's love prompted him to run to his son, to throw his arms around him, and to demonstrate his love by kissing him (v. 20).

The son was showered with his father's love that was spontaneously poured out on him. In this parable Christ was emphasizing that God loves sinners and eagerly anticipates their return. The son began to rehearse the carefully prepared plan that he had devised. He acknowledged his sin, saying, *'I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son'* (v. 21). The father did not let the son continue with his offer to become a servant and to work his way back into his father's good graces. Having already demonstrated affection for the son, the father now gave the signal for the son to receive signs signifying his complete restoration to the privileges of sonship. The father commanded the servants, saying, *'Bring the best robe and put it on him'* (v. 22a). This robe would have the same importance as the robe that Jacob bestowed on Joseph (Gen. 37:3-4), signifying that Joseph had been chosen by his father to be his heir. In Christ's parable, then, the robe signified that this once wayward, but now restored, son

was designated as his father's heir. Further, the father commanded the servants to 'put a ring on his finger' (v. 22b). The ring was a badge of authority. By impressing the signet ring into wax, business transactions were sealed. The conferring of the ring on the son signified that the father was giving his son the privilege of exercising all the authority that belonged to the father in transacting business in the father's name.

Further, the father commanded the servants, saying, 'Put sandals on his feet' (v. 22c). Servants went barefooted. Sandals were a sign that the son was not a servant. This one who came to offer himself as a servant was to receive sandals that would set him apart from the servants in the father's household.

In addition, the father expressed his joy at his sons return by commanding the servants to 'bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate' (Lk. 15:23). The fact that a calf had already been fattened indicates that the father had been anticipating the son's return. The calf that had been prepared in view of the anticipated return of the son was now to be sacrificed. Just as the shepherd found joy in finding the lost sheep (v. 6) and the woman found joy in finding the lost coin (v. 9), so the father found joy in the return and the restoration of his son. This joy was such that it must be shared. Thus, the parable teaches that God loves sinners, that God searches for sinners, that God restores sinners, and that God confers the privileges and blessings of sonship on those who return to Him... On the one hand, these three parables adequately refuted the error of the Pharisees who insisted that God hates sinners and rejoices in their death. On the other hand, these parables reveal God's love for sinners and the blessings that God confers on those who return to Him." (Ibid., pp. 104,105)

- The older son (Lk. 15:15-32)

"And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fattened calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fattened calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry,

and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my Mends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.” (Lk. 15:15-32)

- At least four questions may be asked concerning this threefold parable:
 1. What is its intended lesson? Here three positions may be seen:
 - a. It speaks of the redemption of a lost sinner.
 - b. It speaks of the restoration of a backslidden believer.
 - c. It speaks of both.
 2. What is the key word found in this threefold parable? It is the word "rejoice," appearing in various forms some seven times (Lk. 15:6-8, 10, 24, 29, 32).
 3. What is the reason for this rejoicing? In all cases it results from the recovery of something that was lost.
 4. Who does the rejoicing which Jesus said occurs in heaven when the lost is found? There are three suggestions:
 - a. The angels are the ones rejoicing.
 - (1) Because they are said to be present at the creation and redemption of this world (see Job 38:4-7; Lk. 2:8-14).
 - (2) Because they are interested in knowing as much as possible about the subject of salvation (1 Pet. 1:12).
 - (3) Because they are said to be ministers to the heirs of salvation (Heb. 1:13-14).
 - b. The Savior Himself is the One who rejoices.

Note:

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy" (Jude 24).
 - c. The redeemed saints in heaven are the ones rejoicing.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb. 12:1).