

HIGH FIVES IN HEAVEN

Luke 15:1-10

Key Verse: 10

“In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

What really gets you excited and thrilled, so much that you want to call somebody and share your joy with them? I thought about moments in my life that made me rejoice. One moment was when I hit my first home run in baseball. Actually it was my one and only home run. I remember the joy of my wedding day. I was so thankful to God and to all my church friends in UBF. Another joy was the miracle of watching in the delivery room the birth of my first child, John. I said, Praise God! Praise God! Praise God!” How about you? What is your greatest joy?

We rejoice when we win a prize or a contest. We rejoice when our favorite sports team wins a championship. The Bible says in Romans 12:15, **“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”** Why? Because this is sharing the closest fellowship, when we share someone’s joys and sorrows. We are one with them in spirit.

In today’s passage we learn what makes God rejoice. It is when sinners repent and come back home to God. After being criticized by his critics, Jesus did not blast them with a rebuke. Jesus told three back-to-back parables about the joy of finding something lost. Jesus wanted his critics to share his joy and be on his side, not against him. When we share God’s joy we are on his side. Then what is it that makes God so joyful, joyful enough to throw high fives in heaven? And how can we participate in the joy of heaven? There are two main teachings I want to focus on. But first let’s consider the first two parables. Next week we’ll study the third parable by itself.

First, the Parable of the Lost Sheep (1-7). Before we look at the parable, it is important to catch the context. Look at verses 1-2. **“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”** Two very different types of people are mentioned here. In one camp was the “tax collectors and sinners.” I’m not 100% sure who the “sinners” here were,

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but I have a strong hunch that they were prostitutes and hoodlums. They were immoral and shady people. Some might call them “trash.” These people were gathering around Jesus. Why? Because Jesus welcomed them and ate with them. Isn’t that shocking?

Whom do you like to hang out with? I don’t know about you, but I like to be around law-abiding, peaceful, moral, and kind people. People with colored hair or many tattoos or piercings make me a bit uncomfortable. That’s just me. Guys who wear their pants falling off makes me embarrassed. I like to be around people who make me feel safe, not in danger or at risk. But these risky kind of people came to Jesus. Why? Because Jesus wasn’t afraid to talk and mingle with them. Jesus accepted them, rather than judging them. I challenge you to find one passage in the Bible where Jesus avoided sinners like this.

How about the other camp of people. The other camp was represented by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. They were the religious leaders in Jesus’ time. They wore respectable clothing and behaved properly. And they avoided sinners. Why? Because they did not want to be guilty by association. They were like white towels who didn’t want to get dirty by rubbing shoulders with muddy people. Actually, they were only doing what Psalm 1 said to be blessed, “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers...” They were just trying to keep themselves pure. And isn’t that how we protect our children, by keeping them away from bad characters? And that is necessary to a degree.

The problem with that mentality is that it fosters a judgmental, critical mind toward others who are weaker or less disciplined. So the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticized Jesus saying, **“This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”** Luke has already presented this same criticism in chapter 5. Remember that Jesus called Levi the tax collector from his tax booth saying, **“Follow me, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him? And remember that Levi immediately held a great banquet for Jesus at his house? The same critics levied the same criticism against Jesus’ disciples saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’”** (5:30) Do you remember Jesus’ reply? Jesus answered them, **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”** This time his critics were even more bold to criticize Jesus himself, not Jesus’ disciples. So the

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criticism was that Jesus was welcoming and eating with sinners. Now if you regard yourself as a sinner that should make you feel pretty good. Of course, it should not make you feel justified to live a sinful lifestyle thinking, “Jesus thinks I’m ok.” Jesus loves us too much to leave us as we are. Jesus wants to heal us from our sin-sicknesses. Jesus came to call sinners to repentance.

Ok, now that we have the context of the three parables, let’s look more closely at the first two parables today. **First, the parable of the lost sheep.** Look at verses 3-6. Then Jesus told them this parable: **“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’”**

Jesus lived in an agrarian society. Many people made their living by fishing, farming, herding cattle or raising sheep. Sheep were valuable for their wool, milk, horns, meat and for sacrificing at the temple. Especially, to a shepherd, each one of his sheep is valuable and precious, and even has a name like Blacky, Spots, Happy, Noisy, etc. When I worked on a dude ranch in Colorado at age 15, I knew all 30 horses’ names. My favorites were gentle Kenny, easily spooked Simon, strong QT (Quitting Time), a beautiful bay Shoshone, and the two mules, Jack and Jill.

If one of the shepherd’s sheep goes missing, he runs with his shepherd’s staff to find it, looking in all the likely places. If he still can’t find it, he asks help from his fellow shepherds and neighbors to help him find his lost sheep. As they search, they call its name or make familiar sounds the sheep will recognize. Then they listen carefully to hear it bleating in response. Maybe it is stuck in the mud somewhere, or caught in the bushes or on a cliff. In the worst case scenario, a wolf, or bear or lion carried it off. The shepherd’s greatest joy is to find his lost sheep. When he does, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. In his joy, he calls his friends and neighbors saying, **“Rejoice and celebrate with me. I’m throwing a party, because I’ve found my lost sheep!”**

Shortly after we got our dog Mini from M.Grace Jeon, Mini went missing, because she got out of our backyard gate. My children Hannah and Andrew cried when we lost her. We quickly made a poster saying, “Lost Dog. Please call.” Then

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we put it up on street corner poles and in apartment buildings nearby. Within two hours of losing Mini, we got a phone call: “We found your lost dog.” A neighbor one block away had found her, taken her into their apartment, and then saw the poster right at their apartment. We were so happy to find our lost dog.

We have all heard stories of abducted or lost children being found and returned to their grateful parents. Amidst the chaos of the recent terrorist attack by a truck in Nice, France, a mother misplaced her 8-month old baby boy.¹ Friends of the mother posted a photo on Facebook asking for prayer and help to find the child. As the baby’s family searched for the child, social media users quickly shared the post and spread the word about the missing baby. One tweet was shared 8,500 times. A woman had brought the baby to safety. In this way the baby was found and returned to the mother. The friend later posted, “With such a horrible night it is such a miracle that through all the sharing on Facebook he was found! Thank you to everyone who prayed & shared the posts & picture!!”

Why did Jesus tell this parable? Look at verse 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.”** The shepherd doesn’t rejoice that his 99 sheep are in the pen for they are already safe and sound. The shepherd rejoices to recover his one lost sheep. Jesus says this is the joy of heaven when one sinner repents. When sinners turn to God, in heaven there are high fives of celebration, or fist bumps, or chest bumps. Now let’s hear the second parable.

Second, the Parable of the Lost Coin (8-10). It starts in verses 8-9. **“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’”** This parable is very similar to the first one with a few notable differences. In this case, it is not a shepherd but a woman who loses something. Rather than 1 of 100, she loses 1 of 10 coins. The Greek word for coin here is drachma, which was worth about a day’s wages, like a denarius. At minimum wage that’s about a \$100 coin. It was 10% of what she had, while 1 sheep out of 100, was only 1%. So, in this parable, what is lost is comparably more valuable to the owner. The lost thing is more and more valuable in each succeeding parable.

¹ <https://www.rt.com/viral/351248-nice-lost-baby-search/>

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In Jesus' time, house floors of common people were not tiled or made of wood but simply made of dirt. So it would be easier to lose something small if it dropped on the floor. While the woman was counting her savings, she dropped a coin on the floor, a \$100 coin. Oh no! What if it fell in crack or behind the wall? In desperation, the woman lit a lamp, swept the house and searched carefully. Spiritually speaking, the lost coin represents a lost soul. Souls are valuable to God. How then can lost souls be found?

One way is to light a lamp. Biblically speaking, the lamp is God's word. Psalm 119:105 says, "**Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.**" The word of God leads lost souls from darkness to light and from destruction to salvation. God himself is the light. Revelation 21:23 says of the City of God: "**The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.**" Jesus said in John 8:12, "**I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.**"

Another way to find lost souls is to sweep the house, that is, to remove the dirt or filth. The only way we can be cleansed of sins is through repentance and a blood sacrifice. This sacrifice was made once for all for us by Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, whose precious blood takes away the sin of the world. When we repent of all our sins and trust in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, we are cleansed and forgiven and redeemed. Through faith in Jesus we are no longer dead, but alive, no longer lost, but found.

The woman finally searched carefully. Have you ever lost something valuable, like your cell phone or your car keys or your laptop? Recently, a woman I know lost her apartment key and she had no duplicate. It took much searching but by retracing her steps, she found her lost key. When something is valuable to us, we are willing to search long, hard and carefully until we find it. We even pray earnestly to find it. It is God's love that searches for us when we are lost. We too can help to search for the lost by loving and praying for them.

How did Jesus conclude this parable? Look at verse 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 one sinner repents, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God. Who rejoices? Who is in the presence of the angels of God? Clearly

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angels are there and God is there. It sounds to me like God is high-fiving the angels when sinners repent. God throws a celebration in heaven when sinners repent.

The takeaway from these parables is pretty obvious. Do you want to make God happy, happy enough to celebrate with angels in heaven? Then what do we need to do? Obviously, we must repent of our sins. By now, you should know what “repent” means. The Greek word for repent means to “change one’s mind, turning from sin to God, hating and sorrowing over our sin.” Have you repented of your sins, like immorality, pornography, taking drugs, drunkenness, laziness, rebellion, and the like? Have you confessed your sins today to God?

When children admit and confess things they’ve done wrong, this makes their parents so happy and proud of them. Likewise, God delights when his children confess and repent of their wrong thinking, wrong speaking and wrongdoing. 2 Peter 3:9 says, “[The Lord] is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

The other obvious takeaway from this passage is that we should rejoice when others turn to God in repentance. This is God’s joy. This is spiritual joy. Is this our joy? What makes us so joyful that we want to throw a party and hug and high-five others? We should not make it difficult or stand in the way of those who are turning to God. We should put out a red carpet to lead people to salvation, new life and new identity in Jesus Christ.

D.L.Moody once had a dream to make much money selling shoes. But he turned his efforts to winning souls. One particular event helped him:

A dying Sunday School teacher had to return east because of his health and was greatly concerned about the salvation of the girls in his class. Moody rented a carriage for him[self] and the teacher and went to each girl’s home winning them all to Christ. The next night the girls gathered together for a farewell prayer meeting to pray for their sick teacher. This so moved Moody that soul-winning seemed to be the only important thing to do from then on. He made a vow to tell some person about the Savior each day, even though it eventually meant getting up out of bed at times.²

² <http://nowtheendbegins.com/pages/preachers/dwight-moody.htm>, accessed 8/26/16.

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God's joy is to find the lost. God is seeking for the lost. In fact that's why Jesus came. Jesus said in Luke 19:10, "**For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.**" Jesus, our Good Shepherd, is seeking his lost sheep to bring them home.

Last week there was an earthquake in Italy. Over 250 people died. A 10-year old girl was dug out of the rubble alive after 17 hours.³ Can you imagine the rescuers and relatives joy to find her alive? God's joy when sinners repent and return to God is like that. So many people among us who were lost have been found by Jesus Christ. Have you been found?

Do you want to make God rejoice? Repent of your sins. Do you want to share God's joy? Help bring others to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, through love and prayer. May the joy of the Lord be in us and among us and spreading through us.

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/video/world/europe/10000004610642/girl-rescued-from-rubble-in-italy.html>.