

Luke 15:1-7

Thoughts on the Parable of the Good Shepherd

notes by Tim Hegg

1. Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him.

The picture that Luke gives us is heightened by the word “all the tax collectors and the sinners.” Tax collectors were known for robbing the people, requiring greater amounts than what was legally owed, and “sinners” portrays the way that the “Pharisees and scribes” (in vs. 2) looked at those people who were not very meticulous about keeping all of the *halachah* as framed and taught by the Pharisees and the scribes they employed.

So why were these, the very part of the Jewish population that were considered reprobate by the “religious leaders,” coming near to Yeshua to listen to Him? Here we see, once again, that Yeshua was known for His compassion toward sinners, demonstrating the very reason why He had come to earth as the Incarnate Son of God. As Matthew records:

But go and learn what this means: “I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT SACRIFICE,” for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners. (Matt 9:13)

And hearing this, Yeshua said to them, “It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mk 2:17)

Those who were classed as “reprobates” by the religious leaders, sensed that Yeshua cared for them and had something good to say to them.

Application: In the worldly society of our times, it can be easy to become so distraught at the utter decadency that we fail to find the compassion that our Lord demonstrates, not to accept such lawlessness, but to show them the light of the truth and that Yeshua is able to transform their lives so that they may bring Him the honor and glory He deserves.

2. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

The Pharisees were known for teaching that the meticulous keeping of laws, both biblical as well as those many added “man-made laws” which set them apart from other sects of the Jews, was how a person could gain

merit before God. Here we see the often met perspective that outward signs of “religious behavior” are the means of pleasing God. Rather, it is not merely “outward religious practices” that are acceptable to God, but true obedience to Him and lives that seek, from the heart, to honor and glorify Him by loving Him shown by keeping His commandments.

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.” (1Sam 16:7)

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (1Tim. 1:5)

Application: We must strive for inward purity and devotion if we desire our outward deeds truly to give honor and praise to our Savior Yeshua. Our wonderful traditions must be a means to the goal of glorifying our Redeemer, and not the goal in and of themselves.

3. So He told them this parable, saying, 4. What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?

Yeshua addresses the Pharisees and scribes, those who were grumbling over His association with those people who they classed as “unworthy.” It is very possible that using the parable of the shepherd may have been seen by the Pharisees as beneath them, for they considered the “rural people” to be “unlearned,” “non-religious,” and therefore unworthy of their attention.

Note first of all that in the parable, all 100 sheep belonged to the man who is a shepherd. The ownership of the sheep in this parable is important, for it answers to the regular teaching in the Scriptures that God has, before the foundations of the world, chosen those who would be His and by His grace and mercy would inevitably become sons and daughters in His eternal family.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the

kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3–6)

In Matt 18:12–14, the same imagery is presented but the actual language and words used are quite different. In Matthew, the point of the story is the need for those within a community, including the leaders, to care for those who may be weak in their faith and are easily pulled astray by the cares and teachings of the world.

In our passage, the message is that the Shepherd will never be content with the 99, as though the one missing has no great importance. By no means! The shepherd will do all that is necessary to bring into the fold all those who belong to Him and are under His watchful care. Here, once again, we see that God will lose none of those He has chosen to be His. Every individual who belongs to Him is eternally important and of eternal value to our Shepherd.

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (John 6:37–39)

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. (John 10:27–29)

Application: In time of weakness, a believer may wonder whether he or she is truly a child of God. But we should remember that salvation is by God's grace and by His power, and He will never allow any for whom Yeshua died to be eternally lost. The very fact that a person is concerned about their relationship with God is itself proof that God is at work in their lives. For apart from God's grace and love for His own, no one would have such a concern. God draws us to Himself through loving discipline and by the inward work of the Ruach HaKodesh. His love for His own will always bring about His victory for them.

5. When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.
6. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'

Here, once again, we see the love of God in Yeshua, for He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep, for He gave His life that they would be forever His.

The picture of the Shepherd carrying the sheep on His shoulders is one of close, familial, love and relationship. And what is the exuberant rejoicing? It gives the picture of the very heart of our Lord Who rejoices to see the value of His own death coming to fruition in the rescuing of those for whom He died. This rejoicing is not only tied to the fact that what was lost has been recovered, but also because the Shepherd is pictured as expressing real and deep love for the sheep who are His, for they share intimately in His own eternal life. Moreover, the joy and rejoicing is not confined to the Shepherd! He calls friends and neighbors to come and rejoice with Him as well. This pictures the future, eternal gathering of the elect where, in the world to come, the glories of God and His greatness will forever be the undiminished joy for all who are His.

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

Here, then, is the primary lesson of the parable. We should note that the final line is patently “tongue in cheek,” for the Scriptures are clear that among fallen mankind, there are none who are righteous on their own merits, that is, righteous in God’s eyes. “There is none righteous, not even one.” (Rom 3:10ff). So when Yeshua speaks of the 99 “righteous persons who need no repentance,” He is rebuffing the Pharisees and scribe who, in large measure, believed that they were the “sheep who never strayed,” and thus needed no help but could gain their own “salvation” through their religious practices and way of life.

The lesson, then, is this: the joy that is heard in the heavenlies is the salvation of each and every one whom the Lord has chosen for Himself. Every believer is equally important to the Lord, for each life was bought with the same price and for the same purpose, to give glory and honor to Him.

Application: Surely if each and every person who is in the Body of Messiah is of equal importance to the Lord, then surely we must strive to love each other in truth, and, with wisdom, to seek to bear each one another’s burdens, to help one another, and to strive for unity to the glory of God and our Savior, Yeshua, through the leading and power of the Ruach.