

Prodigal Gift #1

11.21.2021

Luke 15:1-2 (CSB)

15 All the tax collectors and sinners were approaching to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and scribes were complaining, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Introduction: When did the lost become our enemy?

A. With this question, we start the sermon series that will take us up to Christmas.

1. During the upcoming seasons, we will sing and proclaim the phrases:

- a. Joy to the World!
- b. Peace on Earth, goodwill toward men.
- c. We celebrate the great gift that is Jesus, Immanuel, God with us.
- d. We proclaim that Jesus came for all people, all nations, all tribes, and all groups.

2. So I ask, "When did the lost become our enemy"?

- a. When did Jesus rescind the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount?
- b. When did Jesus give us permission to hate?
- c. When did the capacity of heaven hit its limit, declaring that no more should be saved?

B. Luke 15, and the parable of the Prodigal or Lost Son, is one of Jesus' most memorable stories.

1. Like very few others, this parable captures the heart and imagination of even modern-day audiences.
2. We love the story of how God loved us when we were lost, and a mess, and going in the wrong direction.
3. We love this story when it applies to us and the people that we love.
4. But we often ignore that the same Gift of salvation that chased us down until we were found is the same Gift that pursues the people you don't like or love.

C. Furthermore, today's passage confronts us with this reality:

1. Jesus' audience included those who were the outcasts and the sinners.
2. But Jesus' parable was intended not only for the lost sons but the religious older brothers.

D. For the next few weeks, I want us to explore this unique gift that God offers to both the religious and the irreligious;

- a. the lost and the found;
- b. the younger brother and the older brother;
- c. the rule-keeper and the rule-breaker.
- s. Not only does each one of us fall into one or the other category, but the people we will celebrate the holidays with fall into these categories as well.

Let us turn to today's passage:

1. Jesus was surrounded by sinners.

A. I love this about Jesus.

1. Everywhere He went, there were people.
2. And these people reflected the whole gambit of society.
3. Tax-collectors, sinners, prostitutes, Greek and Jew.

B. Many of these people were not the easiest to love.

1. Like we talked about last week, Jesus was often surrounded by the least likely candidates for Kingdom building.
2. Yet, these are the people that Jesus attracted.
3. Jesus was so unlike anything or anyone else that he attracted people of all walks of life.

C. Jesus didn't just preach to these people; He shared life with them.

1. To eat with people is to share life with them.
 - a. If you were here last week, Exodus 24 tells of God sharing a meal with Moses, Aaron and his sons, and 70 elders of Israel.
 - b. To share a meal is to share life.¹
 - c. Table fellowship with people involves participation in their lives. He was removing boundaries that the Pharisees had spent a couple of centuries building...²
2. One of the great dangers of being a long-time Christian is that we tend to not have many unsaved friends.
 - a. Missiologist Todd M. Johnson and his team (In 2013) found that 20 percent of non-Christians in North America really do not "personally know" any Christians.
 - b. That's 13,447,000 people—about the population of metropolitan Los Angeles or Istanbul—most of them in the United States.³

¹ The inclusion of sinners in the community of salvation, achieved in table-fellowship, is the most meaningful expression of the message of the redeeming love of God.¹ Bailey, Kenneth E. *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke*. Combined Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983.

² Grant R. Osborne, *Luke: Verse by Verse*, ed. Jeffrey Reimer, Elliot Ritzema, and Danielle Thevenaz, Awa Sarah, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 375.

³ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/august-web-only/non-christians-who-dont-know-christians.html>

c. Worldwide, the numbers are much worse: more than 8 in 10 non-Christians do not personally know a Christian.

d. Another researcher showed the following:

Only 3 in 10 unchurched Americans (29%) say a Christian has ever shared with them one-on-one how a person becomes a Christian. Only slightly more say a Christian has told them about the benefits of participating in a local church (33%) or the benefits of becoming a Christian (35%).

For 4 in 10 unchurched Americans (40%), they've never had a Christian explain any of those things to them.⁴

D. I submit to you: Many within the world will listen to truth if they hear it.

1. Listening doesn't mean they will immediately repent.

a. Listening doesn't mean they will immediately change.

b. Listening doesn't mean they will become your "mini-me" and protégé.

c. Listening means they internalize what they are hearing.

d. And when the Truth of the Gospel, the Word of God, is internalized, things happen.

2. Luke 14:35, Jesus said, "Let anyone who has ears to hear listen."

a. The following verses say that all the tax-collectors and sinners approached Him to listen.

b. Jesus presented truth, life, and the call to discipleship (Luke 14:33).

⁴ <https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/09/09/christians-dont-share-faith-with-unchurched-friends/>

c. Luke 15 demonstrates that some of those people did listen and had decided to follow Jesus as a disciple.

2. **If we are to be more like Jesus, we need to rub more elbows with people who don't know Jesus.**

a. In these next few days, would you give God some of your time and attention to listen?

b. Listen to what He is asking you to do.

c. Perhaps, He will direct you to call someone you haven't thought of in a long time.

d. Maybe you will be bold to pray at your family's dinner.

e. This week, don't strive to only be a good host but strive to be a good disciple of Jesus.

Not only was Jesus surrounded by sinners...

2. **Jesus was also surrounded by complainers.**

A. "And the Pharisees and Scribes were complaining/murmuring."

1. The scribes were professional people who scribed or wrote the law and made copies.

2. The Pharisees, however, were not professional priests.

a. Pharisee wasn't their job, but their practice.

b. They swore to keep and interpret the law and the traditions, serving as the precursors for modern-day Rabbis.

3. In other words, Jesus isn't being mocked by elitists, 1%ers who did not know what it was like in the real world.

4. The Pharisees, were actually well respected among the people of the day because they came from their own ranks.

B. But they did not like tax collectors and sinners.

1. Tax-collectors “were loathed in every way. Synagogues would not accept their alms. Their testimony was not received in Jewish courts. They were held to be worse than the heathen.”⁵

2. The rabbinic commentary on Exodus 18:1 cites an old rule that “a person should not associate with the godless” and points out that the rabbis would not associate with such a person, even to teach him the Law (*Midrash Mek. Amalek 3 on Exodus 18:1, 65a*).

3. Jesus ate and shared life with sinners: the super-religious wouldn't even come close enough to teach them about God.

C. Not only did the Pharisees keep their distance, but they murmured and complained about those who didn't.

1. The word for murmur and complain connects the context to the murmuring and complaining Israel did in the Desert.

2. Regularly, Israel complained about God not being faithful, not being good, not providing for them, and for providing poor leadership.

3. Now, the descendants were complaining that Jesus was showing too much attention to the lost.

D. The significance of murmuring and complaining goes beyond being disgruntled.

1. Murmuring and complaining signify a developing spirit of rebellion.

2. *“How dare this man make room for sinners at His table?”*

3. *“If Jesus was really whom he said he was, he would be focused on the righteous and not the lost!”*

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [Luke: That You May Know the Truth](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 130–132.

4. How dare Jesus offer life, blessing, and repentance to people that the religious don't like?

E. It wasn't merely the meal and fellowship that the Pharisees resented about Jesus, it was His offer of salvation.

1. Jesus' parables celebrate the lost being found, the angels rejoicing in the return of one lost person.

2. Jesus' fellowship with tax-collectors and sinners was purposed to offer them salvation and room at the Kingdom's table.

3. **We must not murmur and complain about things God has ordained.**

a. Are you ready to celebrate the salvation and deliverance of people you don't presently like?

b. Are you ready to celebrate revival in foreign lands and large cities?

c. Are we ready to make room for, and welcome, people quite different from us?

4. Too often, Christians view themselves as doorkeepers instead of door-greeters.

a. Doorkeepers keep an eye on the door to make sure the wrong people don't enter.

b. Door-greeters keep an eye on the door to make sure that people feel welcomed.

c. The Pharisees saw themselves as doorkeepers.

d. Jesus said, "HE was the Door" John 10:7-9 (ESV)

⁷ So Jesus again said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

5. When religious people draw a line between who can be saved and who can't, we are playing a game that we weren't designed to play.

Application: This week, many of you will share a Thanksgiving meal with family and friends, and many of them you will not agree with.

1. During the holidays, you will have great opportunities to share a meal or a party with lost family and friends.
2. Remember, Jesus loves them.
 - a. People do peoply things.
 - b. Lost people say lost things.
 - c. Even Christians have those moments when we let our anger or frustration slip.
3. I implore us to remember this: Lost people aren't our enemy:
 - a. If Jesus can share His last supper with Judas, you can share a meal with your lost uncle or estranged niece.
 - b. We are called to be like Jesus, and Jesus loved people who were not loveable.

Prayer Points:

1. Ask Jesus for increased compassion and love during this week.
2. I'm going to pray that the Lord turns your table into a table of salvation, redemption, and miracles.
 - a. If you knew that your table would be a place of salvation, redemption, and miracles, who would you want to make sure were there?
 - b. If a person comes to mind, would you earnestly pray for them?

3. This Thanksgiving season, if you are a living miracle, would you be sure to testify to those around of about God's power to heal, change, redeem, and restore?

a. People are looking for hope.

b. And God has given you a story to tell and show of the Hope that only comes through Jesus.