

Christ the Savior

Devotional Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8–13

Background Scripture: John 3:14–17; 10:9–11, 14–16, 27–28

Today's Scripture: Luke 15:3–7; Romans 5:6–10

I. The Seeking Shepherd

Luke 15:3–7

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ “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? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ 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.”

3. The word *them* in this phrase points us to “the Pharisees and the teachers of the law” in Luke 15:2. It is worth noting that Jesus was not the first to teach in parables but his authoritative use of this method characterizes much of his teaching.

4. The hypothetical setting of the parable resonates well with those of a preindustrial era when the majority of people lived on farms. Indeed, that fact of drawing on images of common life is foundational to what makes a parable a parable. Beyond this foundation, however, there is disagreement on a precise definition.

The imagery of a shepherd leaving

99 sheep in search of 1 is startling—and that’s exactly the shock effect that is intended. Much is left unsaid here. Were there other workers available to watch over the 99 during the search? How long would the shepherd be willing to search before giving up? These and other questions are neither posed nor necessary. The emphasis is God’s intense concern for the lost, a concern the Pharisees lack. The expertise of these men should cause them to remember the shepherd-and-sheep imagery in their own Scriptures.

5. As we work our way through this parable, it is essential that we keep in mind the original audiences—plural, because there are two. The audience of Luke 15:1 is eager to hear Jesus; the audience of 15:2 is eager to criticize him. The lamb that was found represents those of 15:1. Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10), and that’s exactly what he’s doing here—something the audience of 15:2 disapproves.

We must be cautious not to fill in details we think should be in the parable. For example, some doubt that a sheep weighing between 100 and 200 pounds could be carried on one’s shoulders. But that imagery is part of the shock value of the parable. The imagery is designed to get Jesus’ hearers to think, identifying the characters in the story with those in real life.

6. The wording here is nearly identical to that of Luke 15:9, which describes shared joy at the recovery of a lost coin. Good news is always worth sharing. Indeed, the language of shared joy and celebration permeates the three parables of Luke 15, with nine references in total. There are three points in Luke's Gospel where the call to rejoice is especially stressed; the other two places are found in Luke 1–2 and Luke 6:23. The contrast in attitude with that of the dour Pharisees could hardly be more striking. To them, sinners are to be marginalized, avoided, shunned, and condemned, not sought out!

7. Jesus now gives the application of his brief parable, which applies to the two main groups listening to him: the “sinners” and the religious leaders. The one sheep that had strayed represents *one sinner* who has strayed from the Father in heaven. When that sinner repents (changes course to return to the Lord), there is *rejoicing in heaven*.

What Jesus is doing is reflecting the self-image of the 99 righteous persons—the religious leaders who speak against him and his actions. It is not that these leaders need no repentance; rather, they believe that they do not need to repent. This makes their spiritual condition even worse. Those who have truly repented should not feel superior to the unrepentant. If anything, their compassion should increase, for they know the freedom from sin that repentance brings. They should desire to see others experience that same freedom.

A shepherd's concern for one lost sheep, while touching, pales in comparison to God's desire to reach lost people.

II. The Giving Son

Romans 5:6–10

⁶ You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for

the ungodly. ⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

⁹ Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

¹⁰ For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

6. The verse's opening *you see* of this section signals additional information regarding the “therefore” of Romans 5:1. The additional information deals with an intersection of *time* and our lack of strength. Paul first pictures the desperation of our condition before Jesus' atoning death on the cross: *when we were still powerless*. This is not measuring physical strength, but spiritual. Sin renders every human incapable of saving oneself. It is another way to say what Paul states in Romans 3:23, that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” By this standard, the most righteous of human beings is as much in need as the wickedest.

The adjective translated *ungodly*, used to describe humanity's condition, is fairly rare in the New Testament. This refers to a life lived without regard for God-honoring beliefs and practices. No one is exempt from being so characterized. Christ's dying for the ungodly is his substitutionary death on the cross, an essential element of the gospel message.

Paul's insight is that while the enemies of Jesus had nothing but malice in their hearts, God had planned all along for his Son's death to be the means of salvation for humanity. The high priest spoke better than he knew when he declared that

it was better for one man to die than to have an entire nation perish.

7. One issue within this verse is the difference between a *righteous person* and a *good person*. Some suggest that the righteous person describes an especially pious individual who possesses a “holier-than-thou” attitude. He may be highly respected, but he is not the kind of person for whom someone would be willing *to die*. The good person would be someone whose good deeds make her a much more likable individual, and, thus, a person for whom others would be more likely to die.

Others suggest that there is basically no difference between the righteous person and the good person, and that Paul is making the same claim in two different ways. The first part of the verse states Paul’s claim in a negative way; the second states it positively. Regardless of the exact distinction between the “righteous person” and the “good person,” the gist of Paul’s statement is that people are not likely to give their lives on behalf of even the best of human beings.

8. Reading this verse alongside the previous two, we can see the contrast Paul desires to make. It is not so much between the righteous person and the good person as it is between the good (and righteous) people of verse 7 and the ungodly people of verse 6. If the chances of someone dying for a good or righteous person are so slim, then the chances of someone dying for an ungodly person are laughable. Herein lies the contrast.

We see the incredible *love* God has shown to all humanity—all of whom are *sinners*—in the fact that *Christ died for us*. Self-help is out of the question; before receiving his salvation, we are all dead in our sins. We need a Savior!

Paul himself never lost his sense of wonder and gratitude for Jesus’ death. The grace that resulted saved him from a sin-

ful past that included the persecution and murder of Christians. He referred to himself as the “worst” of sinners but also the recipient of grace that was “poured out on me abundantly” (1 Timothy 1:14–15).

9. Romans 5 begins with Paul’s declaration that we are “justified through faith” (Romans 5:1). Here, he adds that we are *justified by Jesus’ blood*. To be *justified* is both to be pardoned from all sin (and thus reconciled to God) and to be counted as righteous. Because Jesus died in our place, we are free from condemnation. In this vein, some describe “justified” as being treated “just as if I’d never sinned.”

The means of our justification is Jesus’ blood. The blood of Jesus given at the cross is the price paid to cleanse us from our sins. Just as God saw the blood on the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and declared, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you” (Exodus 12:13), he will “pass over” us when he sees the blood of Jesus covering us. We will not be judged according to our sins. Rather, we will *be saved from God’s wrath*.

10. This verse continues a pattern from verses 6 and 8, above: while we were most unfit for saving, God in Jesus Christ took the necessary action to save us. Building on this idea, Paul introduces another term to picture the impact of Jesus’ death: reconciled. This Greek word occurs six times in the New Testament, and the first two of those are right here.

To be considered *enemies* of God is terrifying—or it should be. Many passages of Scripture speak of God being with us and for us. But there are also passages that speak of his being against sinners. In the verse before us, Paul declares that it is God who has taken the initiative to remove what results in this enmity: the sin barrier. That means of reconciliation is *the death of his Son*.

Involvement Learning

Christ the Savior

Into the Lesson

Recount a time that you got lost. What feelings did you experience? How did that experience affect you?

We have all experienced the feeling of being lost. Today we will study a parable from Jesus along with a teaching from Paul that shows us the extent to which God reaches out to those who are “lost” spiritually.

Key Text

If, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

—Romans 5:10

Into the Word

Read Luke 15:3–7. What are the main themes in this text?

How is God’s redemption evident in it?

How does the parable demonstrate God’s love and grace?

Read Romans 5:6–10. What are the main themes in this text?

How is God’s redemption evident in it?

What does this text teach us about the significance of Christ’s sacrifice?

Into Life

Identify areas where complacency may be present in your life.

How can that complacency cause conflict? Consider how Christ’s reconciling example can inspire change.

Read Ephesians 4:29–32 and Matthew 5:23–24 and write down ways to resolve conflict based on Christ’s example.

Thought to Remember

Jesus is both the seeking Shepherd and the sacrificial Lamb.