

The Gospel According to
Luke

***“Sinners Seeking Savior Meet
Savior Seeking Sinners”***

Chapter 15:1-10

Introduction

The words, “dramatic rescue,” always grab our attention. Whether it’s at sea... Or on land... Or in the air... Images of heroic search and rescue workers risking their own lives to save others fills us with awe. Should they fail during their extraordinary efforts, the people needing saving will perish.

Our text in Luke Fifteen describes several dramatic rescues:

1. The lost sheep might not seem all that dramatic to us; but it would have been very dramatic in their culture, as the lone shepherd went out into the dangerous wilderness to find the sheep before it could be devoured by predators.
2. The lost coin would probably not make our evening newscast! But both of these rescues are stories that illustrate God’s dramatic search and rescue of lost souls.
3. The chapter continues, in verses eleven through thirty-two, with the dramatic rescue of the lost son.

Search and rescue teams have specialties. There is Mountain Search and Rescue; Maritime Search and Rescue; Aerial Search and Rescue; Swiftwater Rescue; Mounted Search and Rescue; Wilderness Search and Rescue. You name the landscape or the conditions and there’s an *S-A-R* group ready to respond.

Maybe we should designate the preaching of the Gospel as *Spiritual* Search and Rescue! Men and women are lost, all over the planet, in every geography and cultural condition. Some realize they are lost, and will reach out for the lifeline. Others do not sense the danger they are in, but need rescuing just the same.

If you are a Christian, you are a member of Jesus Christ's all-volunteer Spiritual Search and Rescue team. Jesus is the Savior seeking them through you. Your 'specialty' is wherever you find yourself in the world surrounded by sinners.

We'll organize our thoughts around two questions: #1 Do You See Yourself As The Sinner Seeking The Savior?, and #2 Do You See Jesus As The Savior Seeking Sinners?

#1 Do You See Yourself As
The Sinner Seeking The Savior?
(v1-2)

The [tax collectors and sinners](#) were sinners; but so were the [Pharisees and scribes](#). The [tax collectors and sinners](#) were reaching out for the lifeline; the [Pharisees and scribes](#) did not sense the spiritual danger they were in. All of them needed rescuing.

Most of you are Christians. You are sinners who have found the Savior. But, if we're not careful, we can become like the [Pharisees and scribes](#). We can become self-righteous, and begin to distance ourselves from sinners. Ask yourself: Do I look upon sinners with *contempt* or with *compassion*?

As the chapter begins, we see sinners seeking the Savior.

[Luke 15:1](#) Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.

The word for [sinners](#) can indicate *immoral people* in general; but it is also used to describe people involved in occupations that were considered incompatible with Jewish law. Tax collecting was one of those occupations, and it was especially despised. Tax collecting was a franchised business. The Roman government sold you a franchise for a certain location. You collected the required taxes, and anything else you could extort was your profit. A Jew who purchased a Roman tax franchise was considered a traitor on top of being a thief.

The particular gripe of the [Pharisees and scribes](#) is going to be that Jesus hung with people whose jobs seemed to disqualify them from the things of God.

There are always going to be jobs that are not compatible with godliness. Perhaps some of you found yourself in such a job when you came to know Jesus, and had to quit. The question for us to ponder is slightly different: *Are people in questionable occupations drawing near to us?*

For their part, the [Pharisees and scribes](#) wanted to repel such people. One popular Jewish saying went like this: “There is joy before God when those who provoke Him perish from the world.” The religious Jews would only receive former sinners – long after they fully converted and proved themselves by many good deeds. Even then, former sinners were always in a second-class position.

Those people [drew near to hear](#) Jesus. There was something about Him, and His words, that they found irresistible. Everything about Jesus invited sinners to [draw near](#). It was His grace, mercy, acceptance, and forgiveness; it was His humility, and humor; it was His openness and vulnerability.

“Come just as you are” **must** remain a major emphasis in our hearts, and in our Church. We might agree about certain incompatible occupations. But what about sub-culture differences? There will always be objectionable practices to challenge us. In the '60's and '70's, it was long hair and bare feet and rock music. Today it's gothic clothing and tattoos and body piercings... *and rock music!*

[Luke 15:2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.”](#)

Their [complaint](#) was really a *compliment*. These guys, students of God's Word; brilliant theologians; super-scholars; had totally missed the nature of God. Listen: Intellect does not automatically make you more spiritual. Intimacy, not intellect, should be your goal.

You can study God's Word and not see God in it! Unbelievers do it all the time. But believers can miss God, too, as they dig in to the

Word. I'm certainly not suggesting we quit studying the Bible! I'm suggesting we read it as a love letter, rather than a textbook. You don't have to read far in the Bible to discover that God seeks after sinners. He came seeking Adam and Eve, right after they'd sinned. He's been seeking all of their kids ever since.

The parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin will highlight the sinner-seeking Savior. What I don't want us to overlook is that these [tax collectors and sinners](#) sought-out the Savior.

There is a whole lot of systematic theology about who searches for who when it comes to getting saved. Is God searching for you? Or are you searching for God? It's the ages-old debate over God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. We're going to see, in these three parables, that God seeks sinners; but we are also going to see that sinners seek God. In other words, as we've pointed out many times in past studies, God is sovereign, **and** man is responsible. **Both** are simultaneously true.

God portrays sinners as seeking Him. He does it in our text; He does it in many other verses. Let me give you just one example; my favorite. It's Acts 17:26-27, where you read,

[Acts 17:26 And \[God\] has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,](#)
[Acts 17:27 so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us;](#)

If sinners are not drawing near to us... Maybe we're *repelling* them, rather than *receiving* them? We may not be doing it maliciously. Some believers are doing it with malice – like the group that attends the funerals of homosexuals and hold up the signs that read, “God Hates Fags.”

We're not doing things like that! But we should be sensitive to other, less obvious, ways in which we might communicate our disgust with sinners. Do we judge their clothing or sub-culture? Do we expect them to change *outwardly* before they've been changed *inwardly* by the Holy Spirit?

Some sinners really are seeking the Savior. Whether they are or not, the Savior is seeking them; which brings us to our second point,

#2 Do You See Jesus As
The Savior Seeking Sinners?
(v3-10)

The three parables in this chapter all go together. They describe the search and rescue of lost souls, and the subsequent joy in heaven over finding them.

The lost sheep and the lost coin focus your attention on the *searcher*; the lost son focuses your attention on the *sourpusses!* The first two compliment Jesus as the Savior seeking sinners; the lost son shows the lack of compassion in the *Pharisees and scribes*, exposing their complaint against the Lord.

Luke 15:3 So He spoke this parable to them, saying:

Luke 15:4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?

Luke 15:5 And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.

Luke 15:6 And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'

Most farms and businesses have a certain level of what they call 'acceptable loss.' But to a shepherd, there was no such thing as acceptable loss. If one sheep out of a hundred... Or a thousand... was missing - *the search was on*.

Shepherds were the animal search and rescue heroes of Bible times! In the Old Testament, David recalled the times he, as a boy tending the sheep, had to fight and kill the cougar and the bear that threatened his flock.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, God was portrayed as just such a Shepherd. Jesus' hearers would have immediately understood the illustration; none of them would have thought the shepherd's behavior extreme.

The point of the parable is in verse seven:

Luke 15:7 I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

Jesus is the Shepherd, searching for sinners, using extraordinary and heroic measures to save them. I'd say leaving heaven, and taking on a human body, and being subject to your own creation to a certain extent, and then dying on the Cross, were extraordinary and heroic measures.

The word, **repents**, indicates that a person has realized they are a sinner in need of a Savior. The **ninety-nine just persons** are the **Pharisees and scribes**. They think they are **just** (righteous); they do **not** think they are sinners, and therefore do not see themselves repenting anytime soon.

One thing that catches my attention in these words is the phrase, **there will be more joy in heaven**. Heaven, by both definition and description, is a perfect place where there is a fullness of joy. You don't have bad days there! Even so, there can be **more joy**; perfect, full joy can somehow *increase* in heaven.

If there is a joy-ometer, it goes off every time someone receives Jesus as Savior – then it holds its new position until the next person, and so on. Jesus' words give the impression that the saving of one soul is broadcast in heaven; it's big news; it creates a party-like atmosphere.

The parable of the lost coin is similar in its teaching:

Luke 15:8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds *it*?"

Luke 15:9 And when she has found *it*, she calls *her* friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!'

The men in Jesus' audience could relate to the parable of the lost sheep. The gals could relate to this one. It's a reminder to us to stay relevant when talking about Jesus as He is revealed in the Bible.

One lost coin was a big deal to this poor **woman**. She tore-up the house looking for it. An extensive, intensive search was made. Jesus was like this **woman** – mounting an extensive, intensive search for every soul that was lost.

We said earlier that some sinners don't realize that they are lost. They're not actively seeking the Savior; but He is nevertheless seeking them. The lost coin is interesting because it is a totally inanimate object. It's lost; *but it doesn't know it is lost!* I think it represents the **Pharisees and scribes**. Jesus was searching for them, to rescue them, just as much as He was the **tax collectors and sinners**.

Luke 15:10 Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

This gives us a little more detail about the joy-ometer. **Joy in heaven** was a general expression; here you see something a little more specific. It doesn't say that the **angels** rejoice. I think that they probably do, because they are in tune with what's happening. It **does** say, **there is joy in the presence of the angels**. God is pictured in heaven as being on His throne, *in the presence of angels*. God is the One rejoicing in heaven when sinners are saved!

God is altogether perfect. You and I add nothing to Him. He doesn't need us. But He nevertheless loves us; and in some amazing way that we will not fully understand until we get to heaven, God's perfect joy allows for increase as each sinner gets saved.

*Do you see Jesus as the Savior seeking sinners? **Of course you do!*** But you and I need to be reminded that Jesus is seeking sinners. Here is what I mean.

Your purpose in life as a Christian is to **enjoy** Jesus Christ. You were created for His pleasure; in His presence is fullness of joy; you are commanded in the Bible to have joy that remains.

The purpose of the Church, which is just a bunch of Christians meeting together, is to enjoy the Lord by **exalting** Him.

There are two by-products of enjoying and exalting Jesus: We are **edified**, and we **evangelize**. “Edify” means to *build-up*. When Christians who enjoy Jesus get together and exalt Him, they get built-up in what they believe. Here at Calvary Chapel we emphasize especially the verse-by-verse teaching of the Bible to exalt Jesus and help us get built-up.

But we are only here, at Church, for a short while. Sunday morning; maybe Wednesday evening; perhaps a few other isolated studies during the week. Most of the time you are out in the wide-world, where sinners need rescuing. Thus, you evangelize.

I did not say you were an evangelist. But you *do* evangelize. People find out you are a Christian. They watch you; they listen to you. They read your life as a letter to them from God. It’s been said that your life is the only Bible some people will read.

OK, so if people are reading your life as a letter from God... What kind of literature do they see? A text book? A rule book? An owner’s manual? A technical journal? An instruction manual? A how-to book? A self-improvement guide?

All of those have their place. Overall, people should see you as God’s **love letter** to them. The other things are contained within the love letter – as sub-sections.

Do people know how much you enjoy Jesus? Do they see that God has joy over you – and over every sinner who gets saved? The best evangelism is to be a healthy, happy Christian.

The danger Christians always face is that of becoming in-grown. It happens when we focus on our own needs and desires as believers. We concentrate solely on ministries that feed ourselves.

In-grown Christians become inbred. They quit searching for sinners. Inbreeding leads to in-fighting. When we get ingrown, inbred, and start in-fighting... You can bet sinners are not going to be drawn to Jesus!

The solution is simple: Constantly remind yourself, and remind others, that Jesus is seeking sinners.

Applying the Word

Maybe we really should think of ourselves as a Spiritual Search and Rescue team:

1. Our services are like the training times that search and rescue workers have, to hone their skills.
2. Our gatherings are opportunities to get to know and love our fellow rescue workers – as if your life might depend upon them one day in a difficult situation.
3. Then, when we are out in the world, we are in Search and Rescue mode - searching for sinners, some of whom will be seeking the Lord, and some of whom won't.