

# THE SAVIOR SAYS, “REJOICE WITH ME!”

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ September 20, 2015

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “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? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> “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? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

“I never want to grow up!” These are the words of Peter Pan, the fabled boy who didn’t want to grow up and so he ran away to Neverland, where nobody grew up, and you could have as much fun as you like with no grown-ups telling you what to do. Now, maybe sometimes parents might wish their kids didn’t grow up (or at least didn’t grow up so fast). Maybe adults wish they could slow down the aging process, or maybe even turn back the clock a few years. But we realize the foolishness of thinking that way. Time is the one constant, always moving, never stopping. Kids grow up & adults grow old.

While we don’t have to work hard to grow up or grow old, there are other things in life that we do have to work at if we want to grow. If we want to grow strong, we need to eat our vegetables and exercise. If we want to grow smart, we need to study. And if we want to grow in our lives as Christians we need to work at that too. It is this spiritual growth which we will be devoting the next several weeks toward - growing in our lives as Christians.

In fact, God expects this out of his followers. He just doesn’t want them to know the basics, he doesn’t want them to remain infants, he wants them to grow. And so just as we will grow physically, we must also be willing to grow spiritually as well. This is growth that can occur in a brand-new Christian, and it is growth that can occur in a seasoned Christian, we can never stop growing. The particular area of growth which we devote our focus toward this morning, is learning to love the lost like Christ. How can we learn to love the lost? By learning why THE SAVIOR SAYS, “REJOICE WITH ME!”

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Rejoicing is spoken about in both of the parables we had from our gospel this morning. But this type of rejoicing was unfamiliar to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were part of the religious

leaders in the land of Israel during the time of Jesus. They fancied themselves better than the rest. They not only knew God's Law, but they kept it to the letter. And for those who didn't keep God's Law, they had nothing but condemnation for them. They considered these people the "sinners," and the only hope they gave was to make your life better or else. The only rejoicing that they spoke of was God rejoicing when he punished wrongdoing.

It doesn't sound all that appealing, does it? And yet this is what the people faced day after day from their religious leaders. It's no wonder then when Jesus came along, people flocked to him. Here was a man who taught them God's Word. Here was a man who didn't condemn them for way of life. Here was a man who held out hope. So you can see the tension building between Jesus and the Pharisees. They were at odds with one another. **"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them,"** they muttered. And yet, Jesus reached out with a heart of love to them also. He used the parable to not only teach what God's love is like, but to get them to realize what their law-following ways got them.

**"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"** Jesus uses an example that fits the culture he's teaching. The land of Israel was full of blue collar workers like farmers and shepherds. They knew what it was like to herd sheep, they probably knew what it was like to lose sheep too. And so Jesus asks, "Wouldn't you go looking for a lost sheep?" The answer is obvious, "Yes, of course you would." Because you care for that sheep, that sheep is worth something to you.

And once you find it, then what? How will you respond? Will you beat the sheep for running off? No, the shepherd puts it on his shoulders joyfully and brings it home. He calls his friends and neighbors together and says **"REJOICE WITH ME!"** It seems so obvious, it seems so simple, this is the natural order of things. Jesus says this is the way it is in heaven. God is the shepherd who has a lost sheep. He searches and finds it. **"There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents"** Jesus says.

But how were the Pharisees acting? They were the ones who were saying, who cares about the lost sheep? We just need to worry about the sheep that aren't lost. Rejoice over the sheep that aren't lost. It's the lost sheep's fault that they're lost. They didn't listen to their shepherd. If only the Pharisees would have taken their own advice. They thought they were the sheep within the sheep pen, but they were in fact the ones that were lost. They were lost even though they didn't know it, the most dangerous kind of lost to be.

It's like when you're going on a road trip. The #1 guy rule on road trips is "never ask for directions." That's because as guys, we think we have this internal compass that always knows where to go. So while the wife is pulling her hair out because she knows they're lost, the husband keeps on going, knowing that they'll find their way eventually. The wife knows she's lost, the husband doesn't. The sinners knew they were lost, the Pharisees didn't.

The sad truth of the matter which the Bible confesses is that we were all lost. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah spoke these words (very applicable to our text), **"we all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."** It doesn't say, "some like sheep" or "most

like sheep” but “all like sheep have gone astray.” I am included in “all.” Far from being that perfect little sheep I often think I am - I am the one who has been caught in the brambles of temptation, I am the one who has wandered along my own path thinking it’s best, I am the one who wanted nothing to do with my shepherd, my creator, my God.

This is the truth for every single one of us. In fact, my human mind cannot even fathom how lost I was, how hostile I was, how dead I was. I only now believe it by faith. A faith that was granted me only because my shepherd sought and found me. He did not write me off as a loss on his books. He left the other sheep to come in search of me. He had nothing to gain and everything to lose by searching for me, but he did it anyway. The last half of that Isaiah passage I just mentioned goes like this: **“we all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”**

Our freedom came at a cost - God’s own son Jesus Christ. But it was a cost he was willing to pay for me. This is why THE SAVIOR SAYS, **“REJOICE WITH ME! I have sought and found you!”** And now the words that open the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm seems so sweet, **“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.”** I cannot help but grow in my love and appreciation for God when I am reminded of the love he showed to me when I was lost. This is God’s love

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But this is not all that God wants us to grow in, that’s not the only reason THE SAVIOR SAYS, **“REJOICE WITH ME!”** He wants us to learn to love the lost like him. Something that every one of us can strive for and improve upon. And for that he has the second parable to share with us. **“Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and lose one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?”**

This second parable is similar to the first. In the first it was a lost sheep that the shepherd had to go and find, in the second it is a lost coin. Now, maybe for us, coins are not as valuable as they were in Bible days, but for this woman in the parable, this coin was valuable - not her whole life savings, but a significant part of her possessions. See the great care this woman showed in searching for the coin. First she lights a lamp, then sweeps the house, and then looked carefully until she found it. The careful searching indicates the importance of the coin to her. And once again, upon finding the coin, the woman is overjoyed and invites her friends and neighbors to celebrate.

Just like that coin, we had no ability to be found, it was only God’s careful searching for us that found us. And so it is with those who do not know Jesus as their Savior, they cannot merely ask to be found, they cannot merely “stumble upon” him. But just as God worked through someone else - your parents, a friend perhaps, he can and does work through you to seek and find others. But of course you knew that, didn’t you?

Maybe you think back to Paul’s letter to the Romans where he writes, **“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who**

**bring good news!” “Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”** These are not just words that apply to pastors and teachers of God’s Word. These are words that apply to every Christian.

As I was preparing this sermon, I came across a significant point about four different attitudes we can have toward the lost. The first is to downright hate them, this is kinda how the Pharisees seemed to view people. The second is to regard the lost with indifference - as long as they’re not bothering me, I’m fine. The third is to welcome them when they come to you - like when they walk in the doors at church. The fourth and final attitude toward the lost is going out and seeking them. I think most of us find ourselves taking the second or third attitude most of the time - one of indifference, or welcome when they come in our midst. But how often have we carefully thought about who the lost are in our lives, and carefully considered how best to reach them?

It is this final attitude that Jesus displayed. It is this final attitude that makes THE SAVIOR SAY, “REJOICE WITH ME! For I seek and find others through you.” We have God’s Word. We have a kind and dedicated church when they get here. But God works through you to get them here. It is the attitude of seeking the lost that we must continue to grow in. It doesn’t take a Bible degree to do, it just takes a simple faith that trusts in the Savior’s words that he will be with us.

Oh how simple life would be if we could just be a kid. We never realized how good we had it - free rent, free food, no bills. But as we grew up our responsibilities increased. But as those responsibilities increased we learned how to handle them and we grew as individuals. The same can be said of our Christian faith. As we grow in our Christian faith, there will be challenges, but challenges we will grow to handle. And not only does our faith grow from these challenges, but God uses that growth to work in others. May God give you the strength and wisdom to grow in your Christian faith as you learn to love the lost like Christ. Amen.