

Luke 15:1-7
The Parable of the Lost Sheep

A 15:1 δὲ Ἦσαν αὐτῷ ἐγγίζοντες πάντες οἱ τελῶναι καὶ οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἀκούειν αὐτοῦ.
 B 15:2 καὶ διεγόγγυζον οἱ τε Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς λέγοντες ὅτι Οὗτος ἁμαρτωλοὺς προσδέχεται καὶ συνεσθίει αὐτοῖς.
 Γ 15:3 δὲ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην λέγων,
 3 15:4 Τίς ἄνθρωπος . . . οὐ καταλείπει τὰ ἐνενήκοντα ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ ἔχων ἑκατὸν πρόβατα καὶ ἀπολέσας ἐξ αὐτῶν ἑνὲνέα καὶ πορεύεται ἐπὶ τὸ ἀπολωλὸς ἕως εὐρῆς αὐτό;
 5 15:5 καὶ εὐρῶν ἐπιτίθησιν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄμους αὐτοῦ χαίρων
 6 15:6 καὶ ἐλθὼν εἰς τὸν οἶκον συγκαλεῖ τοὺς φίλους καὶ τοὺς γείτονας λέγων αὐτοῖς, Συγχαρήτέ μοι, ὅτι εὗρον τὸ πρόβατόν μου τὸ ἀπολωλὸς.
 α 7 15:7 λέγω ὑμῖν οὕτως ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ὅτι . . . χαρὰ . . . ἔσται ἐπὶ ἐνὶ ἁμαρτωλῶ μετανοοῦντι ἢ ἐπὶ ἐνενήκοντα ἐννέα δικαίοις / οἵτινες οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχουσιν μετανοίας.

Text with Study Notes

15:1 Ἦσαν δὲ αὐτῷ ἐγγίζοντες¹ πάντες² οἱ τελῶναι καὶ οἱ³ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἀκούειν αὐτοῦ. 15:2 καὶ διεγόγγυζον⁴ οἱ τε Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς λέγοντες ὅτι Οὗτος ἁμαρτωλοὺς προσδέχεται καὶ συνεσθίει αὐτοῖς. 15:3 εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην⁵ λέγων, 15:4 Τίς ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ὑμῶν ἔχων ἑκατὸν πρόβατα καὶ ἀπολέσας ἐξ αὐτῶν ἑνὸς οὐ καταλείπει τὰ ἐνενήκοντα ἐννέα⁶ ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ⁷ καὶ πορεύεται ἐπὶ τὸ ἀπολωλὸς ἕως εὐρῆς αὐτό; 15:5 καὶ⁸ εὐρῶν ἐπιτίθησιν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἄμους αὐτοῦ⁹ χαίρων 15:6 καὶ ἐλθὼν εἰς τὸν οἶκον συγκαλεῖ τοὺς φίλους καὶ τοὺς γείτονας λέγων αὐτοῖς, Συγχαρήτέ μοι, ὅτι εὗρον τὸ πρόβατόν μου τὸ ἀπολωλὸς¹⁰. 15:7 λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι οὕτως χαρὰ ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἔσται¹¹ ἐπὶ ἐνὶ ἁμαρτωλῶ μετανοοῦντι ἢ ἐπὶ ἐνενήκοντα ἐννέα δικαίοις¹² οἵτινες οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχουσιν μετανοίας.¹³

Grammatical Analysis:

15:1

Ἦσαν: Imperf (Descrip) - Ind - 3 - Pl - εἰμί - they were

δὲ: Coordinate postpositive conjunction - and

αὐτῷ: Pers Pron - Dat of Dir Obj - Masc - Sing - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - (to) him

ἐγγίζοντες: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Pred¹⁴) - Nom - Masc - Pl - ἐγγίζω - they were approaching

πάντες: Adj (Pred) - Nom - Masc - Pl - πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν - all

οἱ τελῶναι: 1st - Subj Nom - Masc - Pl - τελώνης, ὁ - the tax-collectors

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction here joining the compound subject references.

οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ: Adj (Subst) - Subj Nom - Masc - Pl - ἁμαρτωλός, -όν - the sinners

ἀκούειν: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Infin (V: Purpose) - ἀκούω - (in order) to hear

αὐτοῦ: Pers Pron - Gen of Dir Obj - Masc - Sing - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - him

15:2

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction, here linking the two core statements.

διεγόγγυζον: Imperf (Inceptive) - Act - Ind - 3 - Pl - διαγογγύζω - they began grumbling

τε: Coordinate postpositive conjunction, here in a correlative construction: both

οἱ Φαρισαῖοι: 2nd - Subj Nom - Masc - Pl - Φαρισαῖος, ὁ - Pharisees

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction - and

οἱ γραμματεῖς: 3rd - Subj Nom - Masc - Pl - γραμματεὺς, ἕως, ὁ - scribes

λέγοντες: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Modal) - Nom - Masc - Sing - λέγω - saying

ὅτι: Subordinate conjunction introducing substantival object clause.

Οὗτος: Demon Pron - Subj Nom - Masc - Sing - οὗτος, αὕτη, τοῦτο - this one

ἁμαρτωλοὺς: Adj (Subst) - Acc of Dir Obj - Masc - Pl - ἁμαρτωλός, -ον - sinners

προσδέχεται: Pres (Iterative) - Dep - Ind - 3 - Sing - προσδέχομαι - he (regularly) receives, welcomes

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction, here joining to independent clauses - and

συνεσθίει: Pres (Iterative) - Act - Ind - 3 - Sing - συνεσθίω - he (regularly) eats with

αὐτοῖς: Pers Pron - Ins of Assoc - Masc - Pl - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - with them

15:3

εἶπεν: 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Ind - 3 - Sing - λέγω - he told

δὲ: Coordinate postpositive conjunction, here introducing the mildly contrastive response of Jesus.

πρὸς αὐτούς: Pers Pron - Acc of Ref - Masc - Pl - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - to them

τὴν παραβολὴν: 1st - Acc of Dir Obj - Fem - Sing - παραβολή, ἡ - the parable

ταύτην: Demon Pron - Acc - Fem - Sing - οὗτος, αὕτη, τοῦτο - this

λέγων: Pres - Act - Ptc (Adv: Modal) - Nom - Masc - Sing - λέγω - saying

15:4

Τίς: Interrog Pron - Nom - Masc - Sing - τίς, τί - what

ἄνθρωπος: 2nd - Subj Nom - Masc - Sing - ἄνθρωπος, ὁ - man, person

ἐξ ὑμῶν: Pers Pron - Abl of Source - Pl - σύ - from among you

ἔχων: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - Masc - Sing - ἔχω - while having

ἑκατὸν: Adj (Attrib) - Acc - Neut - Pl - ἑκατόν - indeclinable number 100

πρόβατα: 2nd - Acc - Neut - Pl - πρόβατον, τό - sheep

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction, here joining two ptc. phrases - and

ἀπολέσας: 1 Aor (Const) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - Masc - Sing - ἀπόλλυμι - having lost

ἐξ αὐτῶν: Pers Pron - Abl of Source - Neut - Pl - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - from among them

ἓν: Adj (Subst) - Acc of Dir Obj - Neut - Sing - εἷς, μία, ἓν - one

οὐ καταλείπει: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ind (Interrog) - 3 - Sing - καταλείπω - does he not leave (behind)

τὰ ἐενήκοντα: Adj (Subst) - Acc of Dir Obj - Neut - Pl - ἐενήκοντα - indeclinable number 90

ἐννέα: Adj (Subst) - Acc of Dir Obj - Neut - Pl - ἐννέα - indeclinable number 9

ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ: Adj (Subst) - Loc of Place - Fem - Sing - ἔρημος, -ον - in the desert

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction, here joining two independent clauses - and

πορεύεται: Pres (Descrip) - Dep - Ind (Interrog) - 3 - Sing - πορεύομαι - does he (not) go

ἐπὶ τὸ ἀπολωλὸς: Perf (Intensive) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Subst) - Acc of Ref/Place - Neut - Sing - ἀπόλλυμι - to/for the lost one

ἕως: Subordinate conjunction here introducing adverbial temporal clause - until

εὔρη: 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Subjunctive (Potential) - 3 - Sing - εὕρισκω - he (may) find

αὐτό: Pers Pron - Acc of Dir Obj - Neut - Sing - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - it

15:5

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction, here joining two independent clauses - and

εὔρων: 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - Masc - Sing - εὕρισκω - after having found (it)

ἐπιτίθειν: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ind - 3 - Sing - ἐπιτίθημι¹⁵ - he places (it) upon

ἐπὶ τοὺς ὄμους: 2nd - Acc of Measure, Place - Masc - Pl - ὄμος, ὁ - upon his shoulders

αὐτοῦ: Pers Pron - Poss Gen - Masc - Sing - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - his

χαίρων: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Modal) - Nom - Masc - Sing - χαίρω - rejoicing

15:6

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction, here joining two independent clauses - and

ἔλθων: 2 Aor (Const) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Temp) - Nom - Masc - Sing - ἔρχομαι - after having come

εἰς τὸν οἶκον: 2nd - Acc of Measure - Masc - Sing - οἶκος, ὁ - into his own house

συγκαλεῖ: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ind - 3 - Sing - συγκαλέω - he calls together

τοὺς φίλους: 2nd - Acc of Dir Obj - Masc - Pl - φίλος, ὁ - his friends

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction, here joining the compound direct object nouns.

τοὺς γείτονας: 3rd - Acc of Dir Obj - Masc - Pl - γείτων, -ονος, ὁ - neighbors

λέγων: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ptc (Adv: Modal) - Nom - Masc - Sing - λέγω - saying

αὐτοῖς: Pers Pron - Dat of Indir Obj - Masc - Pl - αὐτός, -ή, -ό - to them

Συγχαρήτε: 2 Aor (Const) - Pass (NAE¹⁶) - Imper (Com) - 2 - Pl - συγχαίρω - rejoice

μοι: Pers Pron - Instru of Assoc - Sing - ἐγώ - with me

ὅτι: Subordinate conjunction, here introducing adverbial causal clause - because

εὑρίσκω: 2 Aor (Culm) - Act - Ind - 1 - Sing - εὑρίσκω - I have found

τὸ πρόβατόν: 2nd - Acc of Dir Obj - Neut - Sing - πρόβατον, τό - my sheep

μου: Pers Pron - Poss Gen - Sing - ἐγώ - my

τὸ ἀπολλώλος: Perf (Intensive) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Attrib) - Acc - Neut - Sing - ἀπόλλυμι - lost¹⁷

15:7

λέγω: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ind - 1 - Sing - λέγω - I tell, say

ὑμῖν: Pers Pron - Dat of Indir Obj - Pl - σύ - (to) you

ὅτι: Subordinate conjunction, here introducing substantival object clause of indirect discourse - that

οὕτως: Adv of degree - such

χαρὰ: 1st - Subj Nom - Fem - Sing - χαρά, ἡ - joy

ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ: 2nd - Loc of Place - Masc - Sing - οὐρανός, ὁ - in Heaven

ἔσται: Fut (Pred) - Ind - 3 - Sing - εἰμί - it shall be

ἐπὶ ... ἀμαρτωλῶ: Adj (Subst) - Dat of Ref - Masc - Sing - ἀμαρτωλός, -όν - over, on one sinner

ἐνὶ: Adj (Attrib) - Dat - Masc - Sing - εἷς, μία, ἓν - one

μετανοῶντι: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ptc (Adj: Pred) - Dat - Masc - Sing - μετανοέω - who repents

ἢ: Coordinate disjunctive conjunction, here comparing the first statement to the second statement - than

ἐπὶ...δικαίοις: Adj (Subst) - Dat of Ref - Masc - Pl - δίκαιος, -α, -ον - over the 99 just, righteous persons

ἐνενήκοντα: Adj (Attrib) - Dat - Masc - Pl - ἐνενήκοντα - indeclinable number 90

ἐννέα: Adj (Attrib) - Dat - Masc - Pl - ἐννέα - indeclinable number 9

οἵτινες: Rel Pron - Subj Nom - Masc - Pl - ὅστις, ἥτις, ὅτι - who¹⁸

οὐ: Negative qualifying the verb - no

χρεῖαν: 1st - Acc of Dir Obj - Fem - Sing - χρεία, ἡ - need

ἔχουσιν: Pres (Descrip) - Act - Ind - 3 - Pl - ἔχω - who do not have

μετανοίας: 1st - Gen of Ref - Fem - Sing - μετανοία, ἡ - of repentance

Structural Analysis of Text:

- δέ
- A Dec - Imperf - 3 - Pl - οἱ τελῶναι καὶ οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ
καὶ
- B Dec - Imperf - 3 - Pl - οἱ τε Φαρισαῖοι καὶ οἱ γραμματεῖς
- 1 Dec - Pres - 3 - Sing - Οὗτος
καὶ
- 2 Dec - Pres - 3 - Sing - —————
- δέ
- Γ Dec - 2 Aor - 3 - S - (Ἰησοῦς)
- 3 Interrog - Pres - 3 - S - Τίς ἄνθρωπος
καὶ
- 4 Interrog - Pres - 3 - S - —————
καὶ
- 5 Dec - Pres - 3 - S - —————
καὶ
- 6 Dec - Pres - 3 - S - —————
—
- 7 Dec - Pres - 1 - S - (ἐγώ, Ἰησοῦς)

The literary structure of the text is quite clear.

Statements A and B set up the telling of the parables (3-7, 8-10, and 11-32). This literary context of verses one and two is very crucial to a historical understanding of the significance of the parables. Discourse statements 1 and 2 frame the objection of the religious leaders to Jesus.

The telling of the first parable (lost sheep, vv. 4-7) is introduced by narrative statement Γ which highlights the first parable by the use of the demonstrative ταύτην. The story is introduced by a compound interrogative statement (3 and 4) using the analogy of a sheep and shepherd facing a dilemma over a missing sheep. The solution of the dilemma is contained in statements 5 and 6 with the rescue of the sheep (5) and the celebration of the rescue (6). The application of the parable is contained in statement 7, emphasizing the celebration aspect in statement 6. Only now the reader / hearer is made aware that the celebration is taking place in Heaven and that the rescued missing sheep is actually οἱ τελῶναι καὶ οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ in narrative statement A. The contrast is made strongly in statement 7 between the ninety-nine δικαίους (the Pharisees and scribes) and the one ἁμαρτωλῶ (the sinner and the tax-collector).

The passage doesn't return to the narrative level in order to provide a reaction of the religious leaders to this story. Neither is such found at the end of either the second (lost coin) or the third (lost son) parables. Instead, in 16:1 Luke includes another parable (Dishonest Steward, 16:1-13), before we see a reaction from the Pharisees (16:14). Yet, their reaction is focused on the dishonest steward story¹⁹ rather than on all four parables. The probably suggests that 15:1-32 had a different historical setting originally than 16:1-13, and that Luke has merely blended them together because of the common negative emphasis upon the Pharisees.

“A striking pattern of response can be detected among all three parables despite their individuality. One thrice-repeated note is the *sharing* of joy found in every parable (15:6,9,23). Another is the circumstance of lost and found (15:6,9,24,32). Still another remarkable theme unifying the chapter stressed by the evangelist is the repenting of the sinner (15:7,10,17-21). Above all then, the reader senses ‘the invitation to *share in joy* over the conversion of sinners’ pulsing all the way through. The spirit of the joy and invitation of the returned shepherds and the woman with her recovered coin and the father spontaneously ordering a celebration is downright contagious. The Lukan Christ invites every reader to ‘rejoice with me.’”²⁰

“But the insertion of εἶπεν δέ (ver. 11) clearly marks off the third parable from the first two, whereas these are closely connected by ἢ, which almost implies that the second is little more than an alternative way of saying the same thing as the first.”²¹

Key concepts in this passage (15:1-7) are:

οἱ τελῶναι καὶ οἱ ἁμαρτωλοί:

“Compare 5:30 and 5:21; 6:7; 11:53, where in the Greek text the order is reversed. Compare also 5:17; 7:30; 14:3.”²²

Οὔτος ἁμαρτωλὸς προσδέχεται καὶ συνεσθίει αὐτοῖς.

“Compare Luke 5:29-32; 7:39; 19:7. For the significance of such eating, see comments on 5:30.²³ The OT warnings not to associate with sinful people were no doubt applied to Jesus’ association with tax collectors and sinners. Yet Jesus associated with such people to offer them salvation through repentance and faith, not to participate in their sin. Compare the derogatory ‘this man’ with 14:30.”²⁴

“Table fellowship was the eye of the storm. When Jesus welcomed, perhaps hosted, sinners through the fellowship of a meal, the Pharisees’ criticism rose to the level of a formal complaint: ‘This one receives sinners and eats with them’ (Luke 15:2b). In fairness, their religious sensitivities were offended. They held a lofty view of the table as an altar and a meal as something that should not degenerate into mere eating and drinking. Some of the Pharisees had organized themselves into religious fellowships (called *havurah*) and brought the rules of ritual purity expected in the Temple into their common meals. They compared themselves to Temple priests at the altar when they ate together only with those who kept the law. Causal banqueting with sinners and possibly eating non-kosher food would have been genuinely and emotionally objectionable, and the fact that Jesus had accepted the disciplined fellowship of a Pharisaic meal (Luke 14) may have exacerbated the situation in their eyes.

“Though the Pharisees interpreted the meals with sinners negatively, Jesus instigated these festive fellowships for a positive purpose. These meaningful meals with outcasts were themselves parabolic, ‘prophetic signs, more significant than words, silent proclamations that the Messianic Age is here, the Age of forgiveness.’ After all, the Old Testament anticipated a future shepherd who would feed the sheep of God (Exek. 34:23-24; Mic. 5:2-4) and spoke of a great messianic banquet (Isa 25:6-12; 49:8-13). Jesus would have agreed with the Pharisees that table fellowship is, indeed, socially binding and has religious meaning, but more and other than they imagined. The very essence of Jesus’ ministry and mission can be identified in his determined association with sinners from his baptism to his crucifixion between thieves. He opened up a new chapter in religious history with his attitude toward sinners, but his eating with sinners added up to more than a social misdemeanor to the Pharisees. It may have cost Jesus his life. While the immediate precipitant of his crucifixion occurred when he cleansed the Temple, the issue that put electricity in the air and made his violent death inevitable was his fellowship with sinners. Each of the three parables of Luke 15 places Jesus’ positive interpretation on the meals and contrasts heaven’s response and that of the Pharisees to the table fellowship.”²⁵

ἀπολέσας (v. 4), τὸ ἀπολωλὸς (vv. 4, 6), μετάσου'ντι (v. 7), χρεῖαν μετανοίας (v. 7):

“The parables are connected by them (the joy of the lost being found) and by key words (‘lost’ and ‘found,’ 15:6,9,24,32; ‘rejoice’ and ‘celebrate,’ (15:6,9,24,32). Together the three parables form a tightly knit unit with a single, strongly Lukan theme — God’s love for outcasts and sinners.”²⁶

“The first two parables, like the parables of the mustard seed and leaven (13:18-21), refer to a man (shepherd) and a woman in the same order. It is evident that Luke understood them as a matched pair from the ‘or’ in 15:8 (cf. the ‘again’ in 13:20). In the first parable a shepherd seeks for his lost sheep until he finds it. Returning he rejoices that the lost sheep is found, i.e., returned to safety and the other sheep. The picture part of the parable clearly refers to Jesus’ ministering to Israel’s outcasts and to their entering God’s kingdom. Through the parable Jesus both censured and appealed to his opponents: ‘The lost of Israel are finding forgiveness; sinners are finding salvation. It is time to rejoice. In heaven God rejoices over this. Why won’t you enter into this joy?’ The second parable makes this point using in its picture a woman who has lost a silver coin and finds it.”²⁷

Literary Context of 15:1-7

“The entire chapter functions as an artistic unity that portrays three parabolic responses to criticism. If one is to see the chapter whole, it is particularly necessary to connect the opening two verses (15:1-2) and the closing eight verses. The episode concerning the elder son (15:25-32) is then seen rightly as a rejoinder to the criticism of the Pharisees and scribes and as an invitation to join the festivity of the kingdom.”²⁸

“In this chapter we encounter a new scene in which the Pharisees and scribes complain of Jesus’ association with publicans and sinners (15:1-2). We have already encountered this criticism in 5:27-32²⁹ (Matt 9:11; Mark 2:16), in Luke 7:39³⁰, and will encounter it again in 19:7³¹. Three parables follow that serve both as a defense of

Jesus' ministry to such outcasts (cf. 14:15-24³²) and an appeal to his opponents to join in celebrating their entrance into the kingdom (15:7, 10, 28, 31-32). We find a similar collection of two short parables followed by a longer one in 13:1-9.¹⁵³

“The arrangement of this unit is almost certainly due to Luke's hand. (Note how each parable contains a similar concluding application: 15:7, 10,32.). The tie to what precedes is not as clear. Luke may have placed this material at this point because it further demonstrates the hostility of the Pharisees and scribes toward Jesus (cf. 15:2 with 14:1-6, 15-24; cf. also 16:14-15, 19-31) or because, like the parable of the great banquet (14:15-24), it speaks of the entrance of the outcasts into the kingdom and the exclusion of the religious elite. Luke may even have decided at 14:15 to bring together a collection of parables extending to 16:31. Whereas it is difficult to know the exact reason Luke connected these three parables with the preceding material, they fit well the material found in chap. 14.¹⁵⁴

“At 14:1-6 the Pharisees planted a sick man at a dinner-party to which they invited Christ in order to force a show-down: either he submitted to their rabbinic regulations for the sabbath and left the sick man sick, or else he healed the sick man on the sabbath and showed himself to be sinfully irreligious, in their eyes, by disregarding the ceremonial law.

“Now they criticize him again, this time on grounds of moral laxity: Christ welcomed tax-collectors and loose-living people, and was prepared to take a meal with them. This., according to the Pharisees, was to condone these people's immorality. The criticism was grossly unfair. It overlooked Christ's unambiguous teaching against immorality, which was in fact far stricter than that of the Pharisees themselves (see 16:18; Mt. 5:27-32); and it also overlooked both the purpose for which the tax-collectors and sinners sought his company and his motive in taking a meal with them. They were coming in order to hear him preach (see 15:1) and they knew exactly what moral standards he stood for. But like the prodigal unsatisfied with his husks (see 15:16-17), and wistfully searching for something more satisfying, they were taking their first tentative steps back home to the Father. Of course, Christ welcomed them, and not only to his formal public preaching. He had for them an invitation to a banquet which could satisfy their truest longings with wholesome and magnificent pleasures, instead of the husks with which they had tried to gratify their perverted cravings. How and where better could he explain the invitation to them and show them that it was genuine, and how to accept it, than by taking a meal with them and talking with them over the table? The Pharisees derived great personal satisfaction out of successfully keeping their own religious rules; but they had little interest in the joy of retrieving for God those who had broken God's laws. And that was serious, for as movement 3 is about to tell us, one of the chief delights which the Master of the house invites us to share with him at his banquet is his joy as the Redeemer of men.¹⁵⁵

Lucan Message

“These three parables fit well the Lucan emphasis on God's love and grace for outcasts (cf. 14:12-14, 21-23). God's mercy (cf. 6:36) is now described poignantly by these parables. God has shown his mercy (1:50, 54,58,72,78) by visiting the needy (1:52-53). No doubt for Luke and Theophilus their own entrance as Gentiles into God's kingdom would have come to mind. Was Luke seeking to reassure his readers of God's love and acceptance of them in light of such opposition as found in Acts 11:2-3; 15:1 (cf. Gal 2:11-14)? Probably when Luke wrote, this was no longer an issue. Nevertheless, the parables found in this chapter would remind Luke's readers of what they once were (cf. Eph 2:1-3,12) and of God's great love for them. God accepts all repentant sinners, no matter how outcast they may be.¹⁵⁶

“Luke (ch xv.) has used a similar setting for the three parables of the Lost Sheep, Lost Coin and Prodigal Son, of which the first two form a characteristic pair, while the third is related in subject, but different in treatment. The Lost Sheep (though not its companion parable) occurs also, in a different setting, in Matthew (xviii.12-14). Both evangelists give a ‘moral.’ In Luke it runs, ‘I tell you that in the same way there is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need repentance’; in Matthew, ‘In the same way it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.’ Both cannot be original; possibly neither is. The Lucan ‘moral’ keeps more closely to the terms of the parable itself, but the reference to the ‘righteous’ is open to the objection which arose in regard to Mk. ii. 17 (did Jesus really teach that there were righteous persons who needed no repentance?); and there is the same suggestion of allegory: home-keeping sheep=righteous persons; strayed sheep=sinners; strayed sheep found=repentant sinner; hence, 1 repentant sinner is better than 99 righteous persons. It is a little too mechanical.¹⁵⁷

“The parable teaches in beautiful simplicity what God is like, his limitless love, his boundless love, his amazing grace. In Jesus' ministry God has come in grace offering forgiveness and pardon to outcasts as well as to 'righteous.' The kingdom of God has come, and all are invited to share. Now is the acceptable time (2 Cor 6;2). The acceptable year of the Lord has dawned in which good news comes to the poor, captives are released, the blind receive their sight, and the oppressed are set free (Luke 4:18-19). Yet the God of the parables is also a God of righteousness and holiness. As we shall see in the next chapter, judgment is coming. It already is now casting its shadow on the earth. But still there is time. God in his mercy offers salvation to all. No one need despair — not even the publicans and sinners!”³⁸

Translations

Beck

¹All the tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus to hear Him. ²But the Pharisees and the Bible scholars grumbled and said, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³So He told them this story:

⁴“If anyone of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, don't you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one till you find it? ⁵When you find it, you lay it on your shoulders and are glad. ⁶You go home and call you friends and neighbors together and say to them, ‘Be happy with me. I found my lost sheep!’ ⁷So, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine good people who don't need to repent.”

NIV

¹Now the tax collectors and ‘sinners’ were all gathering around to hear him. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷I 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.

NRSV

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³So he told them this parable: ⁴“When one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

New Living Translation

¹Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. ²This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such despicable people — even eating with them!

³So Jesus used this illustration: ⁴“If you had one hundred sheep, and one of them strayed away and was lost in the wilderness, wouldn't you leave the ninety-nine others to go and search for the lost one until you found it? ⁵And then you would joyfully carry it home on your shoulders. ⁶When you arrived, you would call together your friends and neighbors to rejoice with you because your lost sheep was found. ⁷In the same way, heaven will be happier over one lost sinner who returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!

Today's English Version

¹One time many tax collectors and outcasts came to listen to Jesus. ²The Pharisees and the teachers of the Law started grumbling, “This man welcomes outcasts and even eats with them!” ³So Jesus told them this parable,

⁴“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them — what does he do? He leaves the other ninety-nine sheep in the pasture and goes looking for the one that got lost until he finds it. ⁵When he finds it, he is so happy that he puts it on his shoulders, ⁶and carries it back home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together, and says to them, ‘I am so happy I found my lost sheep. Let us celebrate!’ ⁷In the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent.”

C.B. Williams

¹Now all the tax-collectors and notorious sinners were crowding around Him to listen to Him. ²And so the Pharisees and scribes continually grumbled, and said, "This fellow is welcoming notorious sinners, and even eating with them."

³So He told them the following story:

⁴"What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep, and if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and continue to look for the lost one until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, with joy he puts it on his shoulders, ⁶and when he reaches home he calls in his friends and neighbors, and says to them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost sheep!' ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinful person who repents than over ninety-nine upright people who do not need any repentance.

Endnotes

¹"The periphrastic form *esan...eggizontes* is best understood as referring to a specific occasion." (Reiling & Swellengrebel, TH, Luke 541).

²"*pantes* may refer to all tax-collectors and sinners of a specific place, or may be used hyperbolically and mean 'very many', preferably the latter." (Reiling & Swellengrebel, TH, Luke, 541)

³"The repetition of the article *hoi* before *harmartoloi* suggests that Luke does not consider the tax-collectors and sinners as one group, as contrasted with inarticulate *hamartolous* in v. 2." (Reiling & Swellengrebel, TH, Luke, 541).

⁴"Compare 5:30; 19:7; Matt 20:11." (Stein, NAC, 24:403).

"*diagogguzo* (also 19:7) 'to murmur', 'to grumble', synonymous with *gogguzo* (cp. on 5:30)." (Reiling & Swellengrebel, TH, Luke, 541).

⁵"Strictly speaking Jesus does not tell them one parable, but two parables in question-form, which closely resemble each other and from which the same application is drawn in vv. 7 and 10." (Reiling & Swellengrebel, TH, Luke, 541).

⁶"The question of who would take care of these sheep while the shepherd searched for the lost one would be relevant if this were a true story. In a parable, however, it is irrelevant. The story teller 'takes care' of the ninety-nine." (Stein, NAC, 24:403)

⁷"Literally *desert*. Matthew 18:12 has 'on the hills,' but since most shepherding was done on 'desert mountains' east of Bethlehem, either term could be used to describe this area." (Stein, NAC, 24:403).

⁸"The question of v. 4 changes into a story, describing what happens when the lost sheep is found and leading up to the application in v. 7. *chairon* serves to colour the whole clause (cf. 19:6; Acts 8:39), and explains the rather unusual act of carrying the lost sheep (cp. Lagrange)." (Reiling & Swellengrebel, TH, Luke 543).

⁹"This aspect of the parable's picture expresses the shepherd's loving care and has been a favorite artistic theme through the centuries. Frequently a sheep that became lost was weak and could not keep up with the rest of the flock. Thus the shepherd needed to carry it on his shoulders." (Stein, NAC, 24:403)

¹⁰"In Matt 18:10-14 the sheep are not 'lost' but 'wandering.' If Matthew and Luke are two versions of the same parable, Luke's version seems to fit Jesus' situation better." (Stein, NAC, 24:403)

"The reality part in Matthew refers to believers who are straying (cf. 18:10, 'little ones' and 'their angels'). Matthew appears to have applied Jesus' teaching to the situation of the early church in his own day. If so, this indicates that Matthew believed he was not only a recorder of Jesus' words and acts but also an authoritative interpreter." (Stein, NAC, 403, fn. 196)

¹¹"The future tense can refer to the time of the final judgment or may be a 'proverbial' future referring to the present time. The latter seems more likely since the parallel in 15:10 uses the present tense 'is rejoicing' (*ginetai chara*). The use of the third person 'there will be' functions like a divine passive, for 'God rejoices.' See comments on 16:9." (Stein, NAC, 24:404)

¹²"Compare 5:31-32. From 10:13; 11:32; 13:3,5; Acts 2:38; 17:30 it is evident that for Luke everyone had need of repentance, whether Jew or Greek (Acts 11:18; 17:30). If the ninety-nine refer to the Pharisees and scribes, then these words must be understood ironically as *those who think they are righteous and have no need to repent*. Less likely is the view that Jesus assumed for the sake of argument the claim of his opponents that they were righteous. In the context of Luke 15:1-3 the parable is in fact a call for 'the righteous' to repent by sharing God's joy in the salvation of 'sinners.' Most probably one should not press this detail in the parable and seek meaning with respect to who the ninety-nine represent. The basic reality to which this parable

points is God's great joy over the repentance of the lost as they receive life." (Stein, NAC, 24: 404.)

¹³Matt. 18:10-14, The Parable of the Lost Sheep

18:10 Ὁρᾶτε μὴ καταφρονήσητε ἐνὸς τῶν μικρῶν τούτων· λέγω γὰρ ὑμῖν ὅτι οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτῶν ἐν οὐρανοῖς διὰ παντὸς βλέπουσι τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ πατρὸς μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς. 18:12 Τί ὑμῖν δοκεῖ; ἐὰν γένηται τινὶ ἀνθρώπῳ ἑκατὸν πρόβατα καὶ πλανηθῇ ἐν ἐξ αὐτῶν, οὐχὶ ἀφήσει τὰ ἐνενήκοντα ἐννέα ἐπὶ τὰ ὄρη καὶ πορευθεὶς ζητεῖ τὸ πλανώμενον; 18:13 καὶ ἐὰν γένηται εὐρεῖν αὐτό, ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι χαίρει ἐπ' αὐτῷ μᾶλλον ἢ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἐνενήκοντα ἐννέα τοῖς μὴ πεπλανημένοις. 18:14 οὕτως οὐκ ἔστιν θέλημα ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ πατρὸς ὑμῶν τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς ἵνα ἀπόληται ἐν τῶν μικρῶν τούτων.

(RSV) 18:10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven. 18:12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? 18:13 And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. 18:14 So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.

¹⁴Periphrastic Imperfect.

¹⁵Third plural would be ἐπιτιθέασιν.

¹⁶Causative passive voice usage: be caused to...

¹⁷"The Greek word *apololos*, 'lost,' literally means 'on the way to destruction' and would almost surely have evoked in the memories of hearers of that time the description of the mission of another shepherd, the God of Israel, who promises, 'I will seek the lost and I will bring back the strayed' (Ezek. 34:16). The place of the theme word in the lore of Israel and the fact that Matthew uses the same basic word when summing up his presentation of the parable indicate, however, that Luke could have found it already present in the tradition he used." (Frederick Houk Borsch, Many Things in Parables: Extravagant Stories of New Community (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 58.

¹⁸Introduces a relative adjectival subordinate clause modifying δικαίους.

¹⁹See the textual variants regarding ταῦτα πάντα (16:14) regarding whether the reference is just back to 16:1-13 or whether it reaches back to 15:3-32 as well.. Also notice 16:14b, οἱ Φαρισαῖοι φιλάργυροι ὑπάρχοντες as further indication of the focus being just on 16:1-13, rather than the entire set of parables.

²⁰Jones, Parables, 170.

²¹Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke, 5th ed. (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1922), 367.

²²Stein, NAC, 24:403.

²³"**Why do you eat and drink?** This shared activity implied acceptance of such people as one's 'brothers and sister' (cf. Acts 11:3 and the explanation in 11:4-18, esp. 11:18; cf. also Gal 2:12-13). To 'break bread' with someone had important consequences. Even as contact with lepers (Luke 5:12-16) brought ritual uncleanness, so in the minds of the Pharisees contact with tax collectors and sinners brought moral (as well as ritual) uncleanness." (Stein, NAC, 24:182)

²⁴Stein, NAC, 24:403.

²⁵Peter Rhea Jones, The Teaching of the Parables (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982), 169-170.

²⁶Stein, NAC, 24:400.

²⁷Stein, NAC, 24:401.

²⁸Jones, Parables, 170.

²⁹5:25 And immediately he rose before them, and took up that on which he lay, and went home, glorifying God. 5:26 And amazement seized them all, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, "We have seen strange things today." 5:27 After this he went out, and saw a tax collector, named Levi, sitting at the tax office; and he said to him, "Follow me." 5:28 And

he left everything, and rose and followed him. 5:29 And Levi made him a great feast in his house; and there was a large company of tax collectors and others sitting at table with them. 5:30 And the Pharisees and their scribes murmured against his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" 5:31 And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; 5:32 I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

³⁰7:37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 7:38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

7:39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

7:40 And Jesus answering said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." And he answered, "What is it, Teacher?" 7:41 "A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 7:42 When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more?" 7:43 Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, to whom he forgave more." And he said to him, "You have judged rightly." 7:44 Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house, you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 7:45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. 7:46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 7:47 Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little." 7:48 And he said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

7:49 Then those who were at table with him began to say among themselves, "Who is this, who even forgives sins?" 7:50 And he said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

³¹19:1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. 19:2 And there was a man named Zacchae'us; he was a chief tax collector, and rich. 19:3 And he sought to see who Jesus was, but could not, on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. 19:4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was to pass that way. 19:5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchae'us, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today." 19:6 So he made haste and came down, and received him joyfully.

19:7 And when they saw it they all murmured, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

³²14:15 When one of those who sat at table with him heard this, he said to him, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" 14:16 But he said to him, "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; 14:17 and at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' 14:18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' 14:19 And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' 14:20 And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' 14:21 So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.' 14:22 And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' 14:23 And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. 14:24 For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet.'"

³³Robert H. Stein, Luke, vol. 24 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 400.

³⁴Stein, NAC, 24:400-401.

³⁵David Gooding, According to Luke: A new exposition of the Third Gospel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 269-270.

³⁶Stein, NAC, 24:409.

³⁷C.H. Dodd, The Parables of the Kingdom rev. ed., (London: Collins Fontana Books, 1961)89-90.

³⁸Robert H. Stein, An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 123-124.