

Sermon Draft

Text: Luke 15:1–10

Sermon: “Joy to the Lord”

So why did the Pharisees grumble when they saw Jesus receiving sinners and eating with them? Why did they even care who Jesus chose to eat with? But, they did so they grumbled.

The Pharisees really did want to make God happy. In fact, there was in Jesus' day apparently an ongoing debate about what sort of person makes God the happiest. And there were two proposals. Some Pharisees held to the opinion that the kind of person that makes God the happiest is the kind that has been basically righteous all his life, has always lived well, never had a major moral meltdown or failure. There was another camp, though, that believed God is actually happier still with a person who had lived a bad life and repented and come to the Lord.

Take, for instance, Joe and Stan. Joe was a good little boy, did his homework, his chores, married up, had well-adjusted children, gave some money to responsible charities, went to church, died, and was praised by all as a good guy. Stan, on the other hand, was a bad little boy. He didn't do his homework. He dropped out of school. He nursed addictive habits, live promiscuously, wasted resources. Until Stan, say, at age 32, hit rock bottom, turned his life around, kicked his habits, separated himself from evil, and decided to live for God from now on. In other words, Stan repented and became a good man. When he died, at his funeral, he was praised for how he had turned things around. The Pharisees would debate, then, about whether Joe made God happier or whether Stan made God happier.

Well, which side would Jesus agree with? Would he be happier with Joe, who was a good boy all his life, or with Stan, who was a bad boy and then repented and turned into a good boy?

As we look at the Gospels we see that Jesus wasn't especially happy with either of them. This is why the Pharisees grumbled at Jesus, they believed they were already good so Jesus should have recognized them as such. But who did Jesus come for, the sinner. He wasn't attracting the so called "good people" at all. He was attracting people while they were still bad, sinners. They like us and all who sin and fall short of the glory of God didn't have potential to become good on their own. And yet Jesus likes them; he permits them to come to him without prerequisites or expectations, without probationary periods, without having to prove anything. And the Pharisees grumble about that.

So Jesus tells three parables designed to demonstrate how invested he is in recovering sinners for himself. The parable of the one lost sheep, one lost coin, and then the prodigal son. And what we can learn from these parables is that Jesus loves sinners and seeks them and dies for them, us. And we also see how delighted the Lord is to save us sinners. In each of the three parables, there's a party, and all are invited to rejoice. They are to rejoice . . .

because he rejoices. His rejoicing cannot be contained; he wants others to share it with him. We know that Jesus has saved us by his blood, but it's more than that. We also bring him joy.

We talk about how the Lord is to be our joy, but did you know that we are the Lord's joy? When a person who is lost, wayward, and sinful repents. Jesus says, ***"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner [bad person] who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance"*** (v 7).

In the original form the word “repents” is in the grammatical form we call the participle. It’s a present active participle. That means it’s an ongoing, continuous kind of thing. So it’s more literally translated, “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner repenting than over ninety-nine righteous who don’t need repentance.”

Jesus wants repentant sinners who are continually repenting, or confessing and trying not to repeat the sins we keep on doing. We don’t not reach that point in this life where we can stop repenting. It is a lifelong process. We have to keep on repenting because you keep on sinning. It’s a regular thing. So we need to keep repenting. But the Lord rejoices when sinners (that’s us) repent especially when sinners continually repent.

Have you broken the Commandments? Have you been grumbling and complaining about your life? Are you holding grudges against a friend or your boss or your dad or anyone? Do you entertain evil desires—that you could have the woman on the computer screen? or the one at the gym? Have you snuck around or covered your tracks? told lies to make yourself look better? Do you daydream about how much smarter you are than the president or the governor—or your Facebook[®] friends who say dumb things? Do you lose your temper? yell at people and curse them in your car? Have you been angry with God because he hasn't jumped through your hoops?

We do these things and mostly get away with them, so we think that must mean God doesn't mind or he just doesn't care to notice. But he does notice. Our sins are damaging to people. They are an offense to God, and they are dangerous. We may not get caught (although we may!), but our sins always have consequences.

So, we are not among the ninety-nine righteous who didn't wonder off, sin. We are the lost sheep, the lost coin, so we repent. But not just because of the haunting catalog of sins that could be brought against us. We repent because heaven rejoices over us. Christ Jesus has paid for our sins by dying on the cross. God cannot hold them against us, he doesn't even want to hold them against us. He simply wants to have us with Him.

In fact, it's even more than that. It's not just that he wants us back. But when he finds us, even if it's the third time this week—or today that he had to find us, he isn't angry. He doesn't shake his head or give us a long lecture. He doesn't make us explain ourself. He doesn't think we're dumb or wonder when we'll ever learn. Rather, he, together with all of heaven, rejoices that we were lost but are found. He counts us and sees us as perfectly holy and innocent. And he doesn't keep score and worry that we're probably going to get lost again. He has died for us and removed all guilt so there is now no condemnation, none, for us. He and his angels and the saints in heaven rejoice in our repentance and faith.

Amen