

THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

Study Notes for the Christian Layperson

by: Rev. Jordan McKinley



Luke 15:1-10 ESV

Author and Date:

Luke the Evangelist around AD 55-60. Luke 15 contains three parables, the chief of which is the Parable of the Prodigal Son (vv. 11-32). This teaching takes place during the period of Jesus' travel toward Jerusalem and the cross (see Luke 9:51).

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear [Jesus]. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

- This is the context into which Jesus tells the three parables of Luke 15. The theme connecting these parables is central to the person and work of Christ, who came to seek and save the lost (Luke 5:31, 19:10; Matthew 20:28). The attitude of the Pharisees and scribes demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of the Messiah.

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?"

- This is similar to Jesus' argument for healing on the Sabbath that goes from lesser to greater (Luke 14:1-6). Jesus says there,

"Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into a well on a Sabbath day, will not immediately pull him out?" If you would do that on a Sabbath, even if it would be considered "work" by the standard of the Law, why wouldn't you heal someone on the Sabbath?

- In fact, this is the true meaning and purpose of the Sabbath. God had set aside a day for His people to hear His Word of forgiveness and life, healing the sin that was the cause of their ailments. For us, the Sabbath is no longer linked to the seventh day but is the day when the Word of God is preached and the Sacraments are given. Jesus is our Sabbath (see Hebrews 3:7-4:10) who gives us rest from all our labors (Matthew 10:28-30).
- The image of the lost sheep recalls Isaiah's prophecy (53:6) about the work of Christ when he says of man, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." We are lost sheep in need of rescue from death and hell because of our sin. Even as the shepherd lays the sheep on his shoulders, so also are our sins laid upon Christ.

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⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷ Just 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.

- The contrast between the Pharisees and the rejoicing seen here cannot be any clearer. The Pharisees grumbled at the tax collectors and sinners (v. 2), but the parable describes great joy at the finding of the lost sheep.
- With the words, “Just so, I tell you,” Jesus ends the parable and comments on it. From this we can draw that Jesus, the holy angels, and the Church rejoice at the salvation of the sinner who repents. The author of Hebrews says that Jesus “for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.” If Jesus is the head of the Church, then it follows that the body also rejoices (see 1 Corinthians 12:26).
- But who are the righteous persons who need no repentance? When Jesus begins His ministry, His first sermon is “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Martin Luther’s first of the 95 theses, commented on this verse, saying, “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’ (Mt 4:17), he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.” This is a devastating jab at the Pharisees, who regarded themselves as righteous, based on their reading of the Law. They thought that by their keeping of the moral and ceremonial laws, God would regard them as righteous. But, as St. Paul teaches in Romans 7:7-12, the Law demands more of us than we can render.

⁸ “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

- The second parable tells of a similar search for what is lost and the joy that comes with it. There is, however, a slight variation in the conclusion. Here, Jesus does not include anything about sinners who do not need repentance. We can see from this that the sorrow of those who remain in their sin will not be known to those in heaven, nor does Christ know these sinners who refuse to come to Him (see Matthew 7:21-23 and Matthew 25:12).
- The image of the lost coin, like the image of the lost sheep above, calls all men to repentance. Just like a coin bears the image of the ruler of the land, so also Adam and Eve were minted with the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). At the fall into sin, however, we lost the image of God. But out of His great love for us, God sought us out to restore us. In Holy Baptism, we put on Christ (Galatians 3:27), and the image of God is restored to us (see Ephesians 4:23-24 and Colossians 3:9-10). The old sinful nature is drowned, and a new man arises to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.



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