

Bible Study Guide: Week of 9-5-2022

1. Read through the passage below
2. Read my notes and commentary
3. Read the questions at the end and ponder or discuss with others

Pastor Andrew

Luke 15:1-10

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to [Jesus]. 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“Which 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. ⁸“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹When 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.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

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The tension between Jesus and the religious authorities of his day continues to build here in Luke 15. Some of the previous disputes were based on Jesus’ habit of healing on the sabbath, but even as far back as Luke 5 there were questions posed to Jesus about his habit of eating with “sinners.” We may scoff a bit at the Pharisees and scribes for characterizing others as “sinners” without recognizing their own need of forgiveness, but from their perspective they were the ones who were striving to live by the rule of God’s Law. Whether they were successful at this is an open question, but that was at least their premise. The Greek term for “grumbling” here is *diagogudzo*—a compound word made up of the prefix *dia-*, meaning “through” and *gogudzo*, meaning “to murmur.” The idea is that this is indignant complaining that spreads throughout a crowd. This is the same verb used in the Greek translation of the book of Exodus to describe the action of the Israelites in complaining against God and Moses. It is an onomatopoeic term—a term formed from the sound of what the term describes. English examples would be “buzz” or “chirp.” Here, *gogudzo* or *diagogudzo* mimics the sound of droning bees or cooing pigeons. The point is that these religious leaders were making a bunch of annoying racket about Jesus’ habit of associating with those whom they considered to be “sinners.”

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This parable is actually the first in a triad of parables—the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son (also better known as The Prodigal Son). The focus of the parable is certainly mainly on the determination of the shepherd to rescue one missing sheep, but from the perspective of the 99, there is a sense of recklessness in “abandoning” the remainder of the flock in order to rescue one who strays. Another primary focus of this parable is the joyful and celebratory response to the restoration of the whole flock.

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The second of these three parables similarly focuses on the diligent, yet slightly foolhardy action of the seeker to completely disregard the 9 “safe” coins in order to recover the one lost coin. Again, the end of the parable brings into sharp focus the joyful response to the recovery of what was lost and to the unity of all 10 precious coins.

If we read these parables as allegories, the seeker represents Jesus/God, the lost sheep/coin represents the sinners and tax collectors, and the friends and neighbors represent the “angels” or heavenly host. The scribes and Pharisees are the coins and sheep that do not need to be found, yet they are the ones who are faced with a choice that comes into even sharper focus in the parable of the Lost Son: will “those who need no repentance” join the party? Can they be glad for the shepherd or the coin owner and glad for the restoration of the whole group, or are they simply focused only on their own good and right actions?

Discussion/Reflection Questions:

- 1. When have you heard “grumbling” from self-righteous folks like the scribes and Pharisees? Have you ever participated in such grumbling?**
- 2. Why do you think Jesus spent so much of his ministry among the “sinners” and tax collectors?**
- 3. How do you think the Pharisees and scribes would have reacted to Jesus’ parables here?**