

Luke 14:25-15:10: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Luke chapter 14 verse 25 to chapter 15 verse 10. This man began to build and was not able to finish.

What king going out to encounter another king in war will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace.

So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

It is of no use either for the soil or for the manure pile. It is thrown away. He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. So he told them this parable. 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?

[1 : 4 0] And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

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. 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?

And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

At the end of Luke chapter 14, Jesus expresses the cost of discipleship in the most arresting possible terms. People must hate their own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, in order to follow him.

They must hate their own life. Indeed, if they do not do these things, they cannot be his disciples. Now, Jesus is clearly not telling us literally to hate others, as if the feeling of hatred towards our family members and our own lives were essential to discipleship.

[2 : 5 3] That is not the case. Rather, hatred here refers to the merciless cutting off of loyalties that would supersede our commitment to Christ and following him. Faced with the claim of Christ, nothing else can take priority.

The fact that Jesus makes such claims upon people, for himself, is a sign of his authority. No mere man could rightfully make such claims upon the loyalties of others without falling into idolatry.

Disciples must take up their crosses and follow Jesus. The cross that Jesus was talking about was a symbol that had power. When Jesus' hearers heard him use this word, they'll be thinking about a gruesome means of execution.

A person must count the cost if he wants to be a disciple of Christ. We can often present being a disciple in the most positive of terms, suggesting that it will make people's lives wonderful.

By contrast, Jesus presents discipleship as deeply demanding and alerts us to how hard it is. We try to sell discipleship like a product, while Jesus challenges prospective disciples to demonstrate their level of commitment to him.

[4 : 00] If anyone, Jesus is in the position of the buyer in the transaction. Seems to me we haven't really reflected half enough upon the significance of these verses when it comes to Christian evangelism.

We peddle a vision of what Jesus can do for us, rather than summoning people to the costly commitment of discipleship. True discipleship requires a renunciation of all these different things that would stand in the way of Christ.

Family, one's own life, all your possessions. You must lose all in order to follow Christ and ultimately to gain your life and have riches in heaven. The chapter ends with a warning.

Salt gives savour. It's a sort of solid fire. But if it loses its savour, then what use is it? Salt can't salt itself. Salt is always salt for something else.

Disciples that have ceased to bring a savour to the world are of no use, and they'll end up being thrown out and destroyed, trampled underfoot in the other gospel account. Chapter 15 contains a triplet of parables.

[4 : 59] These parables need to be read together. They each develop a single theme in a different way, and the contrast and the progression between them matters. As we read the parables, it's important to keep in mind that they are addressed to the Pharisees and to the scribes.

They respond to their objection that Jesus is eating with sinners. The first parable is about a shepherd. Jesus, of course, is the good shepherd, and he is addressing the false shepherds of Israel.

This sort of symbolism has a background in the Old Testament. Jeremiah chapter 23, verses 1 to 4. Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture, declares the Lord.

Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people, you have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the Lord.

Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed.

[6 : 03] Neither shall any be missing, declares the Lord. And then in Ezekiel chapter 34, verses 10 to 16. Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against the shepherds, and I will require my sheep at their hand, and put a stop to their feeding the sheep.

No longer shall the shepherds feed themselves. I will rescue my sheep from their mouths, that they may not be food for them. For thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out.

As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country.

[7 : 06] I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.

And the parable reveals the sin of the scribes and the Pharisees. They have destroyed, scattered, and fleeced the flock of Israel. They did not seek the lost. And the finding of the lost sheep leads to a feast of celebration, the joy of which reflects the joy of heaven itself.

The recovery of the lost sheep might also remind us of the idea of the Lord's restoring the soul of the psalmist in Psalm 23 verse 3. The parable of the lost coin is the second parable in the cycle.

The coin would be part of the mark of her marital status. Who is the woman? It seems to me that the woman might be Israel. The implication is that the recovered lost sinners of the house of Israel are akin to the marks of Israel's status as God's bride.

This is one of the ways that Luke expresses the extent of the gospel, that it is addressed to both men and to women. The house imagery might also be worth reflecting upon. We've already read of a swept house in chapter 11 verse 25 in relation to the casting out of Satan.

[9 : 27] Once again, the focus is upon the celebration that follows.

Within this chapter and the chapter that precedes it, the theme of invitation in the context of meals is prominent. What can we learn from reflecting upon this theme as Luke portrays it within these two chapters?

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