

Luke 15:1-10

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[0 : 00] Just one further thing before we turn to the passage that we've read, just to remind you that this evening we have a guest, a preacher, in the person of Alistair Wilson, who is a free church minister, but who is now serving as a missionary together with his family, his wife Jenny and family, in South Africa in the Dumasani Bible College.

And so Alistair will be with us. He will be preaching at the evening service, and at the close of the evening service, he, together with his wife Jenny, will be leading an after-church fellowship and telling us a little bit more about the work that they're involved in in South Africa.

And so I would encourage you to come along and to hear both what Alistair has to say as he preaches, but also at the fellowship following the service.

Why evangelize? Why tell others about Jesus? Already this morning we have been encouraged to do so.

But why do so? Why run a Christianity-explored course in Bonacord? Why invite a friend to participate? Quite aside from the very convincing words of Rob encouraging you to do so.

[1 : 26] Why? Well, there are a number of answers to the question, why evangelize? Some would highlight, and quite rightly so, that this is a means whereby God would be glorified.

We are told in the Scriptures that God is glorified in the salvation of sinners. He is glorified in the announcing and in the proclaiming of the gospel, regardless of the response that there is to it. And so we who have been created to glorify God, we who have been saved to glorify God, we evangelize for this reason. Others would say, and of course these are not competing reasons, they're complementary.

Others would say, well, it's a matter of obedience. We have been commanded to go into all the world and to preach the gospel. We are duty-bound. We are under orders.

We have been commanded to do so, and so we must do so. Whether we want to, whether we feel comfortable doing so, is irrelevant. There is a command, and we simply have to obey.

[2 : 40] Others would highlight the matter, and again, a very legitimate motivation of compassion, given the eternal destiny of the lost.

The Bible is very clear and solemnly clear concerning the eternal destiny of those who do not put their trust in Jesus. Their eternal destiny is an awful one.

And so we who know this to be true, and we who have the good news that they need to hear that they would be saved from such a fate, out of love and compassion, we would tell others of Jesus.

We would evangelize. All of these reasons are right and proper and legitimate. But this morning I want to focus on another reason.

Again, not for a moment suggesting that this is a competing reason, much less a higher reason, but a complementary motivation for evangelizing, and it is this.

[3 : 46] The deep, pure, unadulterated, exultant joy of seeing a sinner saved. A friend converted, a man or woman brought to know and love Jesus.

When it comes to joy, nothing beats that. The joy that the believer experiences is, in a real way, God's joy, finding expression in us.

The Spirit of God who indwells the believer rejoices, and we rejoice with Him. It is spiritual joy, and the world doesn't and indeed cannot get it.

Does God really rejoice over a sinner who repents? Well, that is not a difficult question to answer.

We have read already this morning in Luke chapter 15, and we would remind ourselves of a truth that is stated there so clearly on two occasions in each of these two parables. In verse 7 of Luke chapter 15, we read, and these are the words of Jesus, I 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. And then we read in verse 10, in the same way I tell you there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Now, these parables of the lost sheep and of the lost coin and the one that follows of the lost son are very familiar to us. They've been described quite cleverly, if that's the word, or quite appropriately, this chapter has been described as the gospel in the gospel, and that here we find so much that is essential to our understanding of salvation and of what God has done and does on our behalf that we might be found, that we might be saved. Much could be said on these parables. But I want to focus this morning on this one aspect, the reference in both parables to rejoicing in heaven over a sinner who repents. And following a well-worn pattern, I simply want to pose some questions to this matter, to these verses that we've highlighted and seek to respond to them.

First of all, a question that we want to very briefly consider is, why the rejoicing? What is the cause of this rejoicing in heaven that is referred to by Jesus? But then ask another question, who is it that rejoices? Then ask another question, what does this tell us about God and about us? What does this rejoicing tell us about God? And what does it tell us about us? What does it tell us about you and me?

[6 : 58] And then finally, perhaps by way of exhortation, motivation, application, answer this question, how does this happen? How does it come about that a sinner repents and so that is rejoicing in heaven?

Well, let's consider these questions. First of all, why the rejoicing? Well, in a sense, we've already given the answer to that simply in the reading of the passage, but just to comment on it briefly. What is the cause of this heavenly celebration so vividly described in these verses? Well, the words there are straightforward and simple, and we can identify and find them immediately.

We are told that this rejoicing is caused by one sinner who repents. This is the cause, one sinner who repents. Some might say, well, is that such a big deal? Well, seemingly, in God's economy, it is indeed a very big deal. It's a huge deal, one sinner who repents.

Indeed, if we just think about that very simple expression, one sinner, we can put it another way and say, any sinner who repents. Any sinner who repents. Indeed, we could take that further and say, anybody who repents, for we are all sinners. We are all sinners. So, anybody who repents, anybody gathered here this morning, anybody walking along Rosemont Viaduct this morning, anybody having a lie-in this morning, and there are no plans to see the day until lunchtime, anybody, whoever, anybody who repents, is the cause of celebration in heaven, is the cause of rejoicing in heaven. One sinner who repents. But of course, this one sinner, this anybody, needs to do something that this rejoicing would be produced. This sinner needs to repent. Now, we were thinking about this last week. I'm not going to go over ground that we covered last week.

[9 : 15] But simply to say, anybody who recognizes their condition, who recognizes that they are indeed sinners, and who turns from their sin to Jesus, who turns from their sin and puts their trust in Jesus, and in His finished work on Calvary, on their behalf, anyone who repents, who turns from their sin and turns to Jesus and puts their trust in Him, anybody, anybody who does that is the cause of rejoicing in heaven. Now, just to develop that very briefly, last week we commented, I think very fleetingly, that there was a distinction that could be drawn in the nature of repentance between what we might call a once-for-all repentance, which is that which is produced when a sinner for the first time recognizes his condition, a sinner who is far from God and who is brought to an appreciation of his sin, comes under conviction of sin, and cries out to the Lord to be saved, repents of his sin for the first time.

He repents, and he is brought to faith. He is brought into the family of God. There is repentance in that sense. And then we also noted that the passage last week suggests that there is also what we might call a continuing repentance that should be the permanent practice of every believer because we continue to sin, and so it is necessary for us to continue to repent. But we can distinguish.

Essentially, the same thing is being described, but there is that distinction. Now, just to draw this into our consideration this morning, these parables and this reference to rejoicing in heaven over a sinner who repents would very clearly be pointing towards that man, that woman, that boy, that girl who for the first time turns to Jesus for salvation, who for the first time, having been brought under a conviction of their great need of a Savior, cries out to the only Savior available, the Lord Jesus Christ, repents of their sin, confesses their sin, and trusts in Jesus. Such a sinner, such a man, such a woman, anybody who does this is the cause of rejoicing in heaven. But who rejoices? Let's move on to answer that question.

Well, the two verses, in a sense, if we were to be very picky, we could say, well, what we're told in these two verses is the location of the rejoicing. We're told in verse 7, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents. In verse 10, in slightly different language, but the same basic meaning, in the same way, I tell you there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. The location of the rejoicing is clear, it is in heaven. But who rejoices? Well, if we just notice that second verse, verse 10, rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God. And I ask a very simple question, who are the angels in the presence of? Who do the angels stand before? Well, they are in the presence of God. They are in the presence of the king seated on the throne. And so, when here Jesus speaks of rejoicing in heaven, fundamentally and primarily, and in the first instance, he is speaking of God rejoicing. God rejoices over a sinner who repents. God the Father, the one seated on the throne in heaven. He is no austere, impassive, distant deity ruling from afar. No, he is the one who rejoices over one sinner who repents. He rejoices in the enduring merit of the sacrifice of the one seated at his right hand. He rejoices that another voice will declare the virtues of his Son, Jesus Christ.

He rejoices as he considers all the many ways in which this repentant sinner will be used by God to serve and bless others. There are innumerable reasons why the Father rejoices over one sinner who repents. But the one seated at his right hand, our Lord Jesus Christ, he joins in this rejoicing. Jesus rejoices. And note this significant point, that Jesus speaks with great certainty concerning what happens in heaven for a very simple reason, that he has participated in this rejoicing. He is describing that which he had participated in. He says, I know what I'm talking about because I've been there and I have rejoiced as sinners have repented. And I know that there continues to be rejoicing in heaven over sinners who repent and there ever will be rejoicing in heaven over sinners who repent.

[14:44] I've been there. I know what I'm talking about. I've rejoiced and I will rejoice again when I return to heaven Jesus rejoicing in heaven over sinners who repent. Jesus rejoices. One more sinner repenting that he left heaven for. One more sinner that he died for. One more sinner that his Father lovingly has gifted to him.

One more sinner saved from a futile life and a lost eternity. And so Jesus rejoices together with his Father over one sinner who repents. Who rejoices. God rejoices. But the angels join in. The angels join in.

Why do the angels rejoice? We could ask another question. How do the angels know that a sinner has repented? The angels are not omniscient creatures. If today, and God grant that it be so, if today here in bond accord, a sinner repents, how will the angels know? How will they know in order that they might rejoice? Well, the parables surely give us the answer to that question. When the woman found her coin, what does she do? She calls her friends. She calls her neighbors. And she shares the good news.

And when the shepherd finds the sheep, he brings the village together and says, look, I found the sheep. And so the father and the son, they share this good news with the angels. Another one has repented.

Join with us in rejoicing. One more sinner has repented. This morning in Aberdeen in Bonacord, a sinner has repented. And the angels join. Join in this rejoicing. The angels never grow tired of singing. Glory to God in the highest. And on earth, peace to men on whom his favor rests.

[16:44] As another man upon whom the favor of God rests is brought to repentance and faith. Every day is Christmas in heaven. Every day they can sing these wonderful words of celebration.

How different. What a sad contrast to the Narnia-like experience of so many without God and without hope, for whom it's always winter and never Christmas. Every day is Christmas in heaven. Every day the angels join with the Father and join with the Son in rejoicing over a sinner who repents. Who else rejoices?

Can we not very reasonably also affirm that the redeemed rejoice? Now, the verses say nothing about the redeemed. But let's just consider this for a moment. Are they there? Well, they're certainly there.

We have this promise in the Scriptures. We remember the thief crucified by Jesus' sight. Today you will be with me in paradise. The redeemed are there. The redeemed are gathered around the throne praising the Father and the Son. They're there. And do the redeemed look quizzically on as the Father rejoices and as the Son rejoices and as the angels rejoice? Do they mumble among themselves what's going on or do they know something we don't know? Is that what the redeemed

do? Surely not. They too are given the good news and they too rejoice. Rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents.

And as we consider just a little more what this is all about and what this might look like, and we enter into a realm that we have to tread carefully for we cannot affirm that which what we are not told, but what does this look like, this rejoicing in heaven? We don't have a full picture and it would be unwise to speculate, but we are given an intriguing and heartwarming insight in the prophet Zephaniah concerning what this might look like, this rejoicing in heaven. And as I read the passage in question, I'm not going to ask you to look up the passage. Just listen as I read it. And as I read the passage, just imagine, let your imagination do some work this morning. Imagine that you are peeking in from the outside through a window in heaven. And from the inside the curtain has been drawn just ever so slightly. Maybe one of the angels has just drawn the curtain ever so slightly. You're on the outside and you're peeking in. You can just about see and witness the events unfolding on the inside.

[19 : 55] Now listen to what the prophet Zephaniah says. The Lord is with you. He is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.

He will rejoice over you with singing. What does this look like, this rejoicing in heaven? It looks like God singing, rejoicing and singing over a sinner who repents. And the Son joins in the chorus, and the angels join in the choir, and the redeemed join in the choir as they sing over, rejoice over a sinner who repents. He will rejoice over you in singing. If you would but repent of your sin and put your trust in Jesus. How does God rejoice? He sings exultantly, joyfully, endlessly. And the cause of His singing, a sinner who repents, He rejoices over you. What does this tell us about God and about us? This picture that is painted of heaven, this picture that is painted of the activity of heaven, what does it tell us about God? Well, it tells us a great deal, and we can just mention in the passing one or two things. It tells us about God's purposes. It reminds us that God's great purpose is to save. It reminds us that

God's great purpose is to draw together His elect from every corner of the earth, from every nation and tribe, from every generation. This is the business of heaven, to rejoice in the fulfilling of the purposes of God, and central to the purposes of God. And central to the purposes of God is the saving of one sinner. And His rejoicing in heaven reminds us of this great divine purpose, to seek and to save.

It reminds us also, and teaches us also, and this is very related, of God's priorities. We could ask the question, what is important to God? What is important to God? Sinners are important to God. Sinners are important to God. They are His priority. The saving of sinners occupies His undivided attention. One soul, we are told, is of more value to God than the whole world. You know well the words, what shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? The soul of one man, one woman, is of greater value to God, has a greater priority to God than the whole of planet earth. No doubt God is concerned about global warming. I'm sure He is, but He's more concerned about your soul. He's not unconcerned. Don't misunderstand me. He's not unconcerned about these other important matters, but He's more concerned about your soul. He's more concerned about your eternal destiny.

This priority of God is evidenced and reflected in the heavenly celebration. This is why there is such a celebration because it is God's priority to seek and to save sinners. It tells us then, this heavenly scene tells us of God's purposes. It tells us of God's priorities. It tells us also of God's pleasures.

[23 : 48] What brings pleasure to God? What does He delight in? He delights in Himself. The Father delights in the Son, in the Son, in the Father, and yet they delight together in the saving of sinners. They delight together in the saving of sinners. This is the pleasure of God, to save sinners. The prophets remind us that God delights in mercy, that He enjoys forgiving, that He embraces the returning sinner and throws a huge party.

A rejoicing heaven speaks to us of the pleasures of God. But what does this picture painted by Jesus Himself? An eyewitness account. What does this eyewitness account of heaven, as a sinner repents, what does it tell us about man? What does it tell us about you?

Well, it tells us this. It tells us of man's great value. Yes, at one level, it is a truth, a solemn truth, a solemn truth that we are all filthy sinners. And yet, we are of great value.

You are of great value. That God should rejoice over a sinner is reason sufficient to conclude that a sinner is of great and inestimable value. That God Almighty should so occupy His attention on

your repentance speaks volumes of what great volume you have in God's sight, in God's estimation. And at the end of the day, that is the estimation that counts. Others may think you're of no importance. Others may think you're a loser. Others may brand you as a waste of space. But God considers you to be of great volume. Hence, when you repent, there is great rejoicing in heaven. And surely we can conclude great sadness if you fail to repent. And if you refuse to repent because you are of such great volume to God.

Sinners are priceless to God. You are priceless to God. If we had to put a price on your head, we would have to say it is the price of the shed blood of Jesus. That is how important you are. So, this heavenly scene teaches us and tells us of man's great value, but it tells us also of man's great owner. You see, God rejoices having found that which is His.

[26 : 19] Again, the parables make this abundantly clear. The woman is looking for her coin, not for somebody else's coin. The shepherd is looking for his sheep, not for somebody else's sheep. The coin belongs to the woman. The sheep belongs to the shepherd. And so, when God seeks out and saves a sinner, He seeks out that which is His. You belong to God. You are not your own.

Now, this has many implications. In the first place, one implication is that you would recognize and live in a way consistent with who your owner is. You are not the master of your own destiny. You do not own your own life. You do not own your own body. Indeed. Interestingly, this has implications and is very opposite in the context of the matter we've already commented on this morning, the end of life assistance bill. The philosophical underpinning of that bill is, I can do what I want with my life. I live the way I please and I'll die the way I please.

False. You are not your own. You do not own your own body. It is not for you to decide these things. You do not own yourself. You have an owner, and God is your owner. God seeks and saves that which is His in the first place. And so, this heavenly scene reminds us of who man's great owner is, and to whom we must give account. And of course, following on from that, this heavenly scene tells us of man's one great need, and it is to repent. Again, the rejoicing in heaven reveals us, this is your great need. This is our great need. It is this and only this that will produce this heavenly celebration. You must repent. This is your great need. And this heavenly scene teaches us and reminds us of this great truth. But as we draw things to a close, one final question I want to pose, and it is this. How does this happen? The great cause of rejoicing in heaven that is clearly presented to us, a sinner repenting, how does it happen? How does it come about that a sinner repents?

Well, again, the parables give us the answer. The parables tell us that this repentant sinner is the conclusion of what we might call a search and rescue operation. This repentant sinner comes to this point at the close of this operation on God's part of seeking out and finding and saving.

[29 : 16] And who is the one that searches for the sinner? Who is the head of the search party?

Well, it is God, the Father, with the Son at His right hand. He is the one who searches for the sinner. He is the one represented by the woman who finds her coin, by the shepherd who is looking for the sheep.

And this truth of a seeking God, of a searching and seeking God, is something very revolutionary and radical. It's something that the Jews who were listening to these parables would have had great difficulty in grasping. You see, the religious leaders in the days of Jesus could contemplate.

They could just about get their head around the idea that God would accept the penitent sinner who pleads for mercy. But the picture of a seeking God would scandalize them. The picture that the great God in heaven would actually go out and look for the sinner and seek out the sinner and get his hands dirty. And in the person of Jesus, leave the heavenly courts to seek out the sinner. This is something they couldn't get their head around. But Jesus says, this is the way it is. How does this happen? Well, it happens because God takes the initiative of seeking the lost sinner. This is, of course, also the polar opposite of all man-made religion, of all false religion, where the onus is on the lost sinner to approach God and sort out his problem. Not so the gospel. The gospel is the gospel of a seeking God. The gospel is the gospel of a God who sends his only Son for sinners because he loves you, because he loves this world that he so loved that he sent Jesus, his only Son, to die on Calvary's tree for you. But does God search for the lost sinner alone? We have to conclude that no. We are privileged, we who by grace have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ. We are privileged to be invited to form part of his search party. We are to search with him. In a sense, we might even say we are to search for him.

This is your privilege and responsibility, Christian friend. And how are you to search? How are you to seek out the lost sinner? Well, again, we could say so much from the parables, but we simply

limit ourselves to highlighting three things that can be drawn from the parables without need to specifically referring to them. You are to seek and you are to search passionately because of the great import of what is involved, because of the grave gravity of what is concerned with, because of what we've already seen about God's purposes and priorities and pleasures. So, you who are a son of God must share these things, and so you must search passionately. This must be a matter of prime importance, a matter of great priority in your life and in how you order your time. Search passionately. Search persistently.

The passages speak, the parables speak of how the woman searched for the coin until she found it. She would not take no for an answer. She would not give up. She searched and she searched and she searched until she found it, and so too must we. That is the manner in which we must involve ourselves in this activity that God has given to us to search passionately and persistently, but also expectantly.

[33 : 21] The coin was found. The sheep was found. The prodigal son returned. And so we search expectantly, believing that God will own and will bless our efforts, and that sinners will be saved, and that sinners will repent. And there will be rejoicing in heaven over that sinner who repents.

There are no doubt many ways of participating with God in his seeking after the lost, but all must involve, in one way or another, communicating the good news of the gospel, of communicating that information concerning who Jesus is and what he has done that is necessary for a sinner to understand what they must do. One way of communicating that vital, necessary information, one way, is by participating or inviting people to Christianity Explored. Not the only way, but it is one way.

And so I urge you to see this as one way of participating in this great task that you have been privileged to participate in. But I would say one final thing before I close, and I would direct these final words to anybody here this morning who has yet to be a sinner. And I would say one final thing that you have as you are gathered here this morning. You must conclude, well, as yet, this is not something I have done.

As yet, I have not come to that point where recognizing my condition as a sinner, I have cried out to Jesus that he would forgive me, that he would save me, and that you would put your trust in him. Is it not time? Is it not time?

You can be the cause. Yes, you. You can be the cause of rejoicing in heaven this very day if you would but repent.

[35 : 41] Let us pray.