

“How You, a Sinner, Will Bring Joy to God”

14th Sun. after Pent. – 09/11/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Luke 15:1-10 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 10, [Jesus said,] **“Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”**

Introduction

✘ Today is the 21st anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Towers in New York City. We remember how our country mourned because on that day, nearly 3,000 people were killed; 3,000 lives lost from their families, friends and loved ones.

→ Immediately after the attack there was an unprecedented search and rescue effort for survivors. Over the course of the next 27 hours, 18 people were rescued alive – each time, sparking a celebration not only for the family and friends of that person, but also among the greater community and country; all looking on, eager to find more of those who had been so tragically lost.

→ Even after the last person was found alive, the search continued for another nine months; hundreds of professionals and volunteers sacrificially trying to find all of the remains of those who had been lost.

✘ Today, Jesus tells two parables about His deep desire that each and every soul that has strayed from God and is “lost” to salvation due to their rejection of His teaching and their unwillingness to acknowledge Him as God’s Son and the Promised Messiah, might still be “found” for eternal salvation through God’s gifts of repentance and faith.

→ Yes, even the Pharisees and scribes that made a habit of “grumbling” about Jesus – even they are included in Christ’s love and persistent “search” to find more souls for salvation.

→ I must admit, when I hear in verse two, that the Pharisees’ and Scribes’ primary complaint against Jesus was that “This man receives sinners and eats with them” I still have to shake my head and say, “Seriously? Why do they even care?” If Jesus wants to eat with these people, so what? To each his own.

I. Who Makes the Lord Happier?

✘ It might be helpful to understand these Pharisees a little better. These Jewish leaders 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.

→ There were two proposals: 1) 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 having a major moral meltdown or failure. 2) The other camp believed God is actually happiest with a person who has lived a bad life, but has now repented and come to the Lord.

II. The truth is neither!

✘ Take, for instance, Joe and Stan. Joe was a good little boy, did his homework and chores, eventually married up, had well-adjusted children, gave 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, nursed addictive habits, lived promiscuously and wasted resources. That is until Stan, at age 32, hit rock bottom, turned his life around, kicked his habits, separated himself from evil,

and decided to live for God from that time forward. In other words, Stan repented of his sin and became a good man. When he died, at his funeral, he was praised for how he had turned things around. So the Pharisees debated, did Joe or Stan make God happier?

- ✘ Which side do you think Jesus agreed 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?
 - The Gospels' account of Jesus indicates that Jesus wasn't especially happy with either one of them. In fact, this is why the Pharisees grumbled at Jesus. He wasn't attracting "good" people at all. Though He claimed to be the Messiah, come down from God, the people He hung around were not good for God's image.
 - He was attracting people while they were still bad, like the "tax collectors and sinners" in verse one; those whom the Pharisees believed had zero potential to become good. And worse, He even seemed to like them! He permitted them to come to Him without prerequisites or expectations; without probationary periods; without having to prove anything. This is why the Pharisees "grumbled" about Jesus.
- ✘ So Jesus tells three parables, all designed to demonstrate how invested He is in recovering sinners for Himself – the parable of the one lost sheep, the one lost coin, and then the Prodigal Son. And what is perhaps more significant here in this chapter of Scripture than anywhere else in all of Scripture, is not just that Jesus loves sinners, seeks them out and dies for them. All of that is true, of course. But what we find here is a picture of just how delighted the Lord is to save sinners! In each one of the three parables, we hear of a party – a party where all people are invited to rejoice.
 - Why do they rejoice? Because Jesus rejoices! It's portrayed as if His rejoicing cannot be contained. He can't wait to share His joy with others. So, each of you, think about your own situation: all of you already know that Jesus has saved you by His own blood, right? But it's more than that; you and your salvation bring Jesus great joy!

III. You are the Lord's Joy

- ✘ It's not unusual for us to talk about how the Lord is our joy, but friends, did you know that you are the Lord's joy? Let me explain. There's no question this is true; you bring the Lord joy – your personality, your interests, your contributions, and so forth. But in these two parables today, these are not the things that bring the greatest joy to the Lord.
 - What brings Jesus joy, according to Jesus Himself in His parable, is when a person who is lost to salvation, is wayward and sinful repents. Jesus says in verse seven, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner ['bad person'] who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance".
 - In the original Greek, the word "repents" is in the grammatical form that we call a participle; more specifically it is a present active participle. That means that the action is an ongoing, continuous kind of thing. So a better, more literal translation of verse seven would be this: "There will be more joy in heaven over one repenting sinner than over ninety-nine righteous who don't need repentance". Jesus wants repentant sinners who are continually repenting, not the kind who was led to repent of his/her sins at one time when they were age 32 but now consider themselves to be so good that they don't need to repent anymore.
- ✘ For Jesus, both Joe and Stan that we talked about earlier, if they think they no longer need repentance, are lumped in with the ninety-nine. They do not bring joy to God, just as was the case with the Pharisees and scribes.

→ But the kind of repentance that does bring Him joy is the kind where you and I live a continuous life-style of repenting. And why do you have to keep on repenting? Because you keep on sinning – and so do I. Repentance is a gift from God; an everyday part of the new life of a Christian after his/her conversion. You and I, we need to keep repenting, that is living in the Lord's free gift of grace. And the Lord rejoices when sinners – that means you and I, repent – especially when sinners continually repent!

IV. Continued Repentance Brings the Lord Joy

✘ But you see, this is counterintuitive for us in our human nature. And that's what brings the Lord such joy? How can my continued need of repentance do this? Wouldn't that finally tax the Lord's patience to the point of anger instead of joy? Well, let's say you have a counselor to whom you've been assigned for anger management. Every week you sit with her and report how you did. Let's say you report to her that you did well, that you managed your emotions and didn't yell or injure anyone this last week – she'll be happy. She might even rejoice. But, if you tell her this week, that once again, you lost your temper four times, yelled at people, and hit someone's car with a bat, but now you're sorry, and this week, once again, you are going to "try harder" ... of course she's going to be disappointed.

→ Knowing this, you're going to be reluctant to tell her, because you don't want to disappoint her. This is what we expect: when you report that you were good, she's happy; when you report that you were bad, she's disappointed.

✘ But things are different with the Lord. In our text there is no happiness, no party thrown for the ninety-nine sheep. Yet there is one for the one who was lost and brought back again. And if that same sheep has a bad week next week – wanders off and has to be found again, then yes, once again, there will be another party, another rejoicing over the sheep who was lost and is found.

→ It's as if you said to the counselor, "I had a terrible week. I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I'll try harder next week," and the counselor actually rejoices! Not only that. She then calls all her friends and family to rejoice with her that you failed, but you still kept your appointment. That's not what you or our world would expect. But that is the Lord's reaction to your confession. It brings Him great joy!

✘ So answer this: 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 parent or anyone? Do you entertain evil desires – that you could have that woman on the computer screen? or the guy 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 such dumb things? Do you lose your temper? Do you yell at people and curse them in your car? Have you been angry with God because He hasn't jumped through your hoops?

→ You do these things and mostly get away with them – you're not behind bars after all! So you think that must mean that God doesn't mind, or He just doesn't care to notice. But folks, He does notice. Your sins are damaging to people. They are an offense to God, and they are dangerous. You may not get caught (although you may!), but your sins always have consequences.

✘ So, you are not Joe or Stan. You're not among the ninety-nine righteous. You – yes you are the lost sheep, the lost coin. You need to repent. But not just because of the haunting catalog of sins that could be brought against you. No, repent dear Christian, because heaven rejoices over you! Jesus has paid for your sins by dying on the cross. So God cannot hold them against

you – He doesn't even want to hold them against you. He simply wants to have and hold you in forgiveness and great joy!

Conclusion

✘ In fact, it's even more than that. It's not just that He wants you back. When He finds you, even if it's the third time this week – or today! – that He had to find you, He isn't angry. He doesn't shake his head or give you a long lecture. He doesn't make you explain yourself. He doesn't think you're dumb or wonder when you'll ever learn. Rather, He – together with all of heaven – rejoices that you were lost but now are found!

➔ He finds you in His grace and sees you as perfectly holy and innocent. And because you are covered in His blood, He doesn't keep score or worry that you're probably going to get lost again. When He died for you He removed all of your guilt, so there is now no condemnation as Romans 8:1 says – none – for you! He and His angels and the saints in heaven rejoice in the constancy of your repentance and faith in Jesus alone! Amen.