

GD18 - "He was lost and is found" (Luke 15 & 17)  
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Goose Creek Ward, Ashburn VA Stake  
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### **Historical context**

Luke 15-17 occur at the same time period as last week's lesson, and the content of the text are interspersed with the material covered last week. Jesus is traveling towards Jerusalem for the last Passover before his suffering and crucifixion.

### **Content of Luke 15**

Luke 15 is a set of three parables which are Jesus' response to the Pharisees attempts to insinuate that Jesus is a sinner because he keeps company with sinners.

The entire chapter is rife with insinuation. The Pharisees insinuate Jesus is a low-life because he keeps company with sinners and tax collectors. He is guilty by association, and this is the sort of company he keeps.

Jesus' response is to insinuate the Pharisees have nothing at all in common with the scriptures, heaven, or God. Rather, they are bitter, selfish, and self-righteous. Particularly note that each of the three parables presents God and heaven as rejoicing over the repentant. Jesus does this deliberately to contrast the Pharisaic attitude towards repentant sinners with the heavenly attitude.

### **Luke 15:1-2**

**1 THEN drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.**

The Pharisees and scribes are disturbed by Jesus' popularity, so they insinuate he is popular with those whom they consider to be unrighteous, and he is therefore guilty by association.

The underlying ad hominem argument is the same type, but in reversed form, as that appearing in John 7:45-53. There they say none of the righteous rulers (i.e., us) believe him, so he must be false. Here the argument is that he popular with sinners because he is a sinner.

### Luke 15:3-7

3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying, 4 what man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? 5 And when he hath found [it], he layeth [it] on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together [his] friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. 7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Jesus replies to the insinuation that he is guilty by association by paraphrasing the subject of Ezek. 34. Ezek. 34 is a blistering indictment of the religious rulers who were largely responsible for the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem. Ezekiel presents the Lord as the true shepherd where the religious rulers of the time are false shepherds who exploit the flock (cf. Ezek. 34:1-10). Ezekiel then continues the parable to say the Lord will gather out the sick and the afflicted sheep and tenderly care for them (cf. Ezek. 34:11-16), and then he will separate out the rams who tread the sheep under foot and set up the true messianic ruler David (cf. Ezek. 34:16-24).

Jesus' parable is largely a paraphrase of Ezek. 34:15-16:

15 I will feed my flock, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD. 16 I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up [that which was] broken, and will strengthen that which was sick...

In paraphrasing Ezek. 34 Jesus accomplishes a number of things. He insinuates the present Pharisees are no different from those false prophets Ezekiel castigates. He parallels the publicans and sinners whom they despise are Ezekiel's sheep. And, finally, he implies that he is there as the Messiah, as Ezekiel predicts the overthrow of the false prophets and self-promoting rams with the return of David:

23 And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, [even] my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. 24 And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken [it].

Then, finally, Jesus closes the parable with v. 7 where he indicates God and heaven rejoice over the repentant sinner. Where the Pharisees reject and despise, heaven accepts and forgives.

### **Luke 15:8-10**

8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find [it]? 9 And when she hath found [it], she calleth [her] friends and [her] neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. 10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Jesus' second parable is obscure because the implicit tradition is not explicitly referenced and the KJV translation glosses over some subtleties in the text.

First, the tradition referenced in the text is that of a Middle-eastern wedding head dress, which forms part of the ancient traditional dowry. The bride would wear part of the dowry as ornamentation. These coins would not necessarily be particularly valuable, so they would have sentimental value. This is the case in the parable as the silver coins referenced in v. 8 are drachmas, which are not all that valuable.

Second, the "friends and neighbors" referenced in v. 9 are feminine in the Greek, unlike the "friends and neighbors" in v. 6. Since this loss is largely a sentimental one dealing with her wedding dowry, her other female friends would be the ones who would sympathize most with her.

Jesus' intent is to say that just as a woman cherishes the things of her wedding and has a great deal of sentiment towards them, so does heaven feel towards the children of the covenant. Just as the bride would rejoice when some cherished sentimental memento of the wedding is found, so does heaven rejoice when a lost sinner repents.

Note Jesus again explicitly contrasts the joy of God and heaven over the repentant sinner with the Pharisaic response.

### **Luke 15:11-32**

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons: 12 And the younger of them said to [his] father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth [to me]. And he divided unto them [his] living. 13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. 15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks [Gk: carob pods] that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. 17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to

spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. 20 And he arose, and came to his father.

But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. 21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. 22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put [it] on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on [his] feet: 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill [it]; and let us eat, and be merry: 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. 28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. 29 And he answering said to [his] father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: 30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. 31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. 32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

This third and last parable is one that is well-known and well understood. However, there are some obscurities worth noting. Regarding the "riotous living", the Greek term here is "asotos" and does not necessarily require sexual immorality as implied by the accusation of v. 30. The Greek most literally translated means "un-save", as in to not save anything, or to squander your wealth. This more literal reading is what the context suggests, and not sexual immorality. The accusation of soliciting prostitutes is just that, an accusation by a bitter brother.

The bitter older brother is extremely hostile, to the point of rejecting his brother (e.g., "this thy son" not "my brother"), trying to pit the father again the younger brother (e.g., "devoured thy living" not "devoured his inheritance"), and fabricating accusations against him (e.g., "with harlots"). The bitter older brother, who is self-righteous (e.g., "neither transgressed I...thy commandment") an self-promoting (e.g., "I serve thee...yet thou never gavest me a kid"), represents the Pharisees.

The father represents God. Note Jesus closes the parable with the father getting the last word in v. 31-32. The father

ignores the bitter son's protests and tells him what really is the most important thing.

This last most detailed parable ends the three with a very unflattering characterization of the Pharisees. One that is all too real, even today.

### Content of Luke 17

Luke 17 diverges from the intentions of ch. 15, and simply follow a series of historical events. The two events pertinent to the subject of this lesson are v. 1-10 and v. 11-19.

#### Luke 17:1-10

1 THEN said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe [unto him], through whom they come! 2 It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. 3 Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. 4 And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.

5 And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. 6 And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

7 But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? 8 And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? 9 Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. 10 So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

v1-10 comprises a set of instructions given to the disciples. Verses 1-4 are a reiteration and distillation of Matt. 18:1-22. This particular rendition warns against offenses (v. 1) and casts woe upon those who cause offense so great that it results in harm to another believer's faith (v. 2). But, it also tells the people to correct and forgive the offender (v. 3) as often as they offend (v. 4). This would presumably be in the case of lesser offenses and honest mistakes, as opposed to malicious acts of sedition, which Paul apparently alludes to in Acts 20:29-30.

Verses 5-6 deal with faith. The apostles ask Jesus to increase their faith, but Jesus' reply is that making it "larger"

so to speak isn't what he wants. It isn't a matter of quantity, it is a matter of quality. One can have faith as small as a grain of mustard seed and if it is genuine then one can do miraculous things that are seemingly impossible, cf. Matt. 17:20. In this case, the miraculous thing which is seemingly impossible is the ability to continually forgive one another.

Verses 7-10 address Christian service. When a slave does the slave's labor they are not thanked for it because it is expected of them. So too should a disciple do the disciples labor and not expect to be rewarded for it. The attitude of the disciple should be one of duty and obligation, and not of looking for thanks and rewards, or of having done enough and therefore being done. Verse 10 also serves as a warning against self-righteousness and self-aggrandizement when they do the things required of them, cp. Mosiah 2:21-25.

Jesus' main point is that part of Christian discipleship is to repent and forgive one another (v. 3-4). While this is difficult, it is not impossible (v. 5-6), if you develop your faith and remain humble (v. 10).

v6 "sycamine tree", i.e., a mulberry tree.

#### **Luke 17:11-19**

11 And it came to pass, as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 And as he entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: 13 And they lifted up [their] voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. 14 And when he saw [them], he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 And fell down on [his] face at his feet, giving him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. 17 And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where [are] the nine? 18 There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. 19 And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole.

This is a well known and well understood story. I'll comment on some of the obscurities in the implicit messages in the text.

First, why were leprous Jews living in Samaria? They had been rejected by the Jews because of their leprosy, and yet the Samaritans, whom the Jews despised for their derivative religion, were more accepting of the lepers.

Second, why is that nine leprous Jews were keeping company with a leprous Samaritan? Their leprosy had sufficiently humbled the nine Jews that they no longer observed the normative Jewish disdain for Samaritans. They were all unclean together, so the bigotry and social elitism fell by the wayside.

Finally, why does the Samaritan return and thank Jesus while the other nine Jews do not? All ten of them believe in Jesus and had faith (cf. v. 13) and were devout enough to follow Jesus' instructions to go to the Temple to see the priests (cf. v. 14). Why only the Samaritan? The implicit message isn't that they are not thankful, it is that they are still putting the details of the Law ahead of Mercy. In v. 17 Jesus asks the question "Where are the other nine?" They are at the Temple seeing the priests so they can pronounce them clean. They are more interested in fulfilling the details of the Law than is the Samaritan. In v. 13 all of them ask for mercy, but in v. 15-16 only one of them places mercy before the justice of the Law.

v14 Jesus' sending them to the priests is per the requirements of the Law, cf. Lev. 13.

### Conclusion

#### D&C 64:9-14

8 My disciples, in days of old, sought occasion against one another and forgave not one another in their hearts; and for this evil they were afflicted and sorely chastened. 9 Wherefore, I say unto you, that ye ought to forgive one another; for he that forgiveth not his brother his trespasses standeth condemned before the Lord; for there remaineth in him the greater sin. 10 I, the Lord, will forgive whom I will forgive, but of you it is required to forgive all men. 11 And ye ought to say in your hearts--let God judge between me and thee, and reward thee according to thy deeds.

12 And him that repenteth not of his sins, and confesseth them not, ye shall bring before the church, and do with him as the scripture saith unto you, either by commandment or by revelation. 13 And this ye shall do that God may be glorified--not because ye forgive not, having not compassion, but that ye may be justified in the eyes of the law, that ye may not offend him who is your lawgiver-- 14 Verily I say, for this cause ye shall do these things.

Here, the Lord commands two different levels of judgement and forgiveness. There is the interpersonal level and the corporate Church level. At the interpersonal level we are required to forgive each other all the time. At the corporate Church level the Church is required to act according to the rules the Lord has given when it comes to sin and transgression.

Why is it "there remaineth in him the greater sin"? What is the Lord talking about? I believe he is commenting on human psychology. People who have not ever really repented and humbled themselves are more prone to be less forgiving (cf. Matt. 7:1-5). It is those who have repented of their sins and humbled

themselves who do not look for sin in others and who forgive one another more fully. Like the bitter older brother in the parable of the prodigal son.