

More About Jesus, Week 10: Jesus Sought the Lost (Luke 15) by Paul Hammons

In the gospel accounts, people were always ready to tell Jesus what he should be concerned about during his time on earth:

- *Is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar?* (**Matt. 22:17**)
- *What about the political persecution by the Roman government?* (**Luke 13:1**)
- *Why aren't your disciples following the traditions of the elders?* (**Mark 7:5**)
- *Tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me!* (**Luke 12:13**)

But throughout his life and ministry, Jesus consistently focused on spiritual issues. Most importantly of those, he focused on seeking and saving the lost. That wasn't a priority for the Jewish leaders of his day, and as a result, he faced the constant criticism of being "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (**Luke 7:34**).

In fact, Jesus was constantly surrounded by "sinners" - because they continually sought him out (**Luke 15:1**). They did so because unlike the religious leaders of the day, Jesus was also seeking them out. He repeatedly emphasized that *"I came not to call righteous, but sinners"* (**Mat. 9:13**). He focused on the lost because that was God's focus - God's purpose for sending him to this earth (**Luke 19:10**). And it should have been theirs as well!

When Jesus was approached by a sinful woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, Simon watched and thought to himself, *"If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner"* (**Lk 7:39**).

Jesus accepted the outpouring of thanks from the woman, telling Simon, *"Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much"* (**Lk 7:47**).

He told four parables in succession beginning in Luke 15 that highlighted his desire to seek the lost:

- **The parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7)**, which describes the priority of finding the one lost sheep over remaining with the 99 who were already secure.
- **The parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10)**, which shows the urgency and diligence of his search for the one who is lost, and the joy when that soul is finally recovered.

- **The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)**, which not only illustrates God's love and desire to see the unrighteous child return home, but his disapproval of the one who is resentful of his brother's repentance.
- **The parable of the unrighteous steward (Luke 16:1-9)**, which implies that the ones who feel secure in their salvation will one day be called to account for wasting their own stewardship, and that they ought to see those "undesirable debtors" as a means of ensuring their own salvation by showing mercy to them.

Jesus' focus in everything he did was finding the soul that needed to be restored, even the one that didn't believe it needed restoring! Jesus not only welcomed the repentant tax collector, but he also grieved for the seemingly pious Jews who lived in false security as God's judgment approached (**Luke 19:41-42**): *"Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!"*

In many ways, today's religious culture continues to insist on assigning its own priorities to Jesus' teaching, insisting that the church focus on socio-political issues or general quality of life for its members. And in many cases, seeking the lost is seen as an afterthought, or in some cases as unloving in itself!

But in **Luke 24:47**, Jesus told his apostles what God had long before determined to be the church's greatest priority:

"...that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to ALL nations, beginning from Jerusalem."

How concerned are we about the thing that mattered most to Jesus? What are we doing to fulfill our Lord's greatest desire for his people and for the world we live in today?