

Luke 15

John Karmelich

Title: God feels joy! Why that is important!

The first thing to grasp is if God is perfect, that means He is perfectly loving to people who committed their lives to Jesus (as God) and are trusting in His complete sin payment. At the same time, He's fully angry at sin. It's not a contradiction. A perfect God is perfect in every way. Personally, I'd want to be with a God who's full of joy. It always amazed me that God created man in Genesis Chapter 1, but then in Chapter 6 God announces He is going to flood the world due to corruption by sin. Also consider the book of Exodus, where God did all sorts of miracles to get the Israelites out of Egypt. Shortly after that God announces every Israelite over 40 will die to a lack of obedience. If we'll spend eternity with God, hopefully we will experience His joy and avoid His wrath!

Chapter 15 is only three stories that tie well together as all three focus on what brings God joy: Sinners repenting then turn to God! Of course, I realize as I say way too often, I'm preaching to the choir! One of the strange things I pondered is if it brings God joy to see people repent and turn to Him, why bother trying to be good if we're only saved by faith? What's an argument against waiting for a deathbed time to convert? Besides the obvious that we may not get that opportunity, the reason He desires we turn to Him now is so we can use our lives for His glory. I've always liked the saying, "Without God we can't, without us, God won't!" With all that out of my system, let me talk about these stories and the joy God "feels" for a lack of a better term, and more importantly why we should care.

The chapter has three stories. The first is about a shepherd abandoning his duty to recover a lost sheep! It's an argument for "Once saved, always saved" as the third story will show. The second story is about a woman rejoicing over finding a lost coin. The third is the famous "prodigal son" one. I'd argue since both sons turn from God it is misnamed. In all three stories we get a message about rejoicing over one who in effect turns to God after rejecting Him! Again, I realize people reading my studies have already committed their lives to Jesus. So, why read this? It reminds us of what brings God joy and truthfully, I want to spend eternity filled with joy. But won't that get boring if we're in heaven and all we're doing is celebrating person after person being saved? If God's excited over people getting saved, that means we need to feel joy over what brings God joy! I'm positive heaven will never be boring. To welcome saved people is a part of His nature and if it brings God joy, I'd want to be near Him!

Time for specifics: Realize in Israel at that time, the religious leaders understood the Old Testament is constantly using shepherds as referring to Israel's leaders. They also get the fact that sheep refer to the Israelites in that land. The text says the audience was a mixture of sinners (a word used often by Luke to refer to those who don't take their relationship with God seriously) and the devoutly religious. Luke emphasizes the fact the religious leaders assumed Jesus is tied to the devil because He spent lots of His time talking to non-believers. Here in Luke, the first story is a shepherd who leaves his 99 sheep alone to get one that was lost. The text emphasizes that the lost one is carried on the shepherd's shoulders. It shows how grateful God is when the lost one returns to Him!

Then we get the first reference to joy in heaven. The text says there's more joy in heaven over a sinner who repents than 99 who don't. Does that imply there are different levels of joy in heaven? Possibly, I also pondered are the 99 saved if they don't need to repent? Remember Jesus is addressing a mixture of devoutly religious and those who don't take God seriously. The "sinners" still care about what is going to happen to them in the next life so they're pondering "What will it take?" The only thing we're sure of

is the one on the shepherd's shoulder is the one he's focused on and that's a representative of the fact God caring about the lost.

The second parable in this chapter is similar in its point. The focus is on a woman who lost one of ten silver coins. The text said in effect, she "tore the house apart" until she found it. Some commentators argue it's like an engagement gift and the 10 coins go together. Anyway, finding it was a big deal. It's like the first parable in that in both cases a celebration was done once the deed was done!

So why two separate parables about recovering what was lost? As a teacher, repetition is necessary for something to sink in! In both cases, it was the one in charge seeking what was lost! I can hear most of you thinking, I committed my life to Jesus a long time ago, how does this affect me? For starters it is a reminder God never gives up on people, even when we do. I always liked the concept that to go to hell one must step over Jesus as He's always reaching out to the lost. The last part of this parable says there is joy before the angels in heaven when the lost person gets found. It's talking about God being joyful!

Now we come to the third parable about the lost being found. It's usually titled the Prodigal Son. Both sons of one father are lost in this story, but we'll get to that soon enough. In this made-up story, the dad had two sons. The younger one, probably a teenager, told dad in effect, "I'm not waiting for you to die, so give me the portion of your estate now!" The father was under no obligation to split it. He did it out of love. The younger son cashed it out and wasted it all. As most of us know, when that son was broke and starving, he apologized to God and decided to return home to beg to be a servant of his fathers. For forgiveness in that society that son would have to "earn" it to make up for his mistake. The story states how the father had to run out to see the son, meaning he was looking for, and hoping he'd return. Those listening to Jesus probably shuttered at what the father did to accept back His son. The lesson is once a true moment of repentance comes, God is willing to accept us faults and all just as we are!

That leads me back to the question, why live for God now, if we can make a conversation anytime? I'd argue a life lived for Jesus now is never wasted and leading others to Him is what we're called to do. It leads us to the older son. The father decided to throw a big party for the lost son. The text says that the lost son got a ring and robe was given to him, both symbols of being part of the family. My joke is the father was thinking, "Son, please take a bath first as you smell like bacon (from feeding pigs)!" Notice the father didn't get the other brother involved in planning the welcome home party. The other brother became aware of the party by asking people what the "noise" is all about.

Anyway, the other brother made a big fuss about his brother to his father, only referring to him as "this son of yours"! The other brother complained that his father never did anything for him. Dad reminded him that since his brother wasted his part of the estate, what remains is already his! This shows that the stay-at-home brother was also lost and resented the fact his father welcomed him back. It shows that the older brother didn't care for his father and in effect was "buying time" till his father died! It was wrong to assume he was good enough spending his life working for his father. What's obvious is he showed a lack of respect for his father. The text implies the father loved both sons and the celebration was due to the other son returning. The text is not clear if the older son ever got saved, but it's not the key point of all three parables. The key point is God is joyful over anyone turning to Him, just as they are!

OK John, good for "those people" who hit rock bottom and turned to God. What about me? I make an effort to serve God at my church or some other effort. Of course we can teach this to the lost. It also is a reminder to us that our works NEVER make a difference for our salvation. The point is God wants us to use the time we have on earth to make that difference for Him.

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on the link for the detailed study. It's still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for everyone who reads this.