

## How You Bring Joy to God

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Three Services**

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*So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance." Luke 15:3-7*

I want to share with you the tale of two boys this morning. The first boy was named Joe.

Joe was a good little boy. He did his homework; he did his chores; he was a well adjusted child. He grew up, got married, and raised a nice family. He went to church. He gave some money to the church and he gave some money to responsible charities. When he died, he was praised by all as a really good guy.

The other boy's name was Stan. I am told he was a bad little boy. He didn't do his homework very often. He eventually dropped out of school. He was addicted to some drugs. He lived a sexually loose and permissive life. At age 32, he hit rock bottom. But he managed to turn his life around, get rid of his bad habits, and keep away from bad friends. He even decided to live for God the rest of his life. When he died, many people got up to speak on his behalf and praised him for really turning things around.

Now I have a question for you. Which of these boys brought joy to God? Which of these boys made God happy? Joe? Stan? Both? I'll share an answer in a minute or so..

In our Gospel lesson this morning tax collectors (much despised) and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. The Pharisees and the scribes were not happy about that. They grumbled, "This man receives sinner and eats with them."

Let's try to understand these Pharisees a little better. They really did want to make God happy. That's probably why so many of them emphasized the law and tried to lead righteous lives. But we are told there was an ongoing discussion among many Pharisees about what sort of person makes God the happiest. Some Pharisees held the opinion that the kind or person most likely to make God happy is the one who has been basically righteous all his life. There was another group, though, that believed God is actually happier when a person who has lived a bad life changes for the better and starts keeping God's laws.

You may be surprised with the answer to my question earlier about Joe and Stan. There is nothing to indicate in the Gospels that Jesus was particularly happy with either of them. Many students of the Bible would say that the best answer to the Joe and Stan question, based on the information given, is "Neither"! Why do I say that?

Well, Jesus responded to the grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes by telling two parables. He told the parable of the lost sheep and he told the parable of the lost coin. But note that in both of these parables the lost sheep does not save itself and the lost coin does not find the owner. They are sought out. Jesus demonstrates here how dedicated he is to recovering sinners. He loves people, and seeks sinners out so they will be saved, and was willing to die for them.

There is another point here. The man not only looks for the lost sheep and finds it, but he lays it on his shoulders and brings it home. The lost sheep needs help. It cannot fend for itself. But realize that the Lord is only talking about sheep as symbols here. What he is really talking about is you and me, and we are the lost ones, the ones who can't fend for ourselves, and we need to be carried by him to get safely home.

Actually, there is a flaw in both the accounts of Joe and Stan. There is no mention of repentance in either one. They both seem to do well in the end and are praised for the good things they have done. But there is a pitfall here. There's something important missing. There is nothing here about repentance. If what was said is all there was to their lives, then it shows a work-based religion, because even in the best of lives, there is sin.

God spoke through Isaiah among others and said this about us: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6) God spoke through his Apostle Paul who used these words in Romans 3: 23, "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That's why we have to experience physical death on this earth. But Romans 6:23 follows with the good news: "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Let's get back to the text for an answer to what brings God joy. What brings God joy is when a person who is lost, wayward, and sinful repents. Jesus says in Luke 15:7, "I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who REPENTS than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Actually, Rev. Jared Melius, pastor Of Mount Zion Lutheran Church in Denver, CO, makes an interesting point in his sermon about Luke 15:7. He states that the original word for "repents" is actually a present active tense of the verb and can be more literally translated as "repenting". So we could say the following, "I tell you,, there will be more joy in heaven over one person 'repenting' than over

ninety-nine righteous persons who don't need repentance". I think he makes a good point here. The kind of repentance that brings joy to God is not just a one time thing but someone who is willing to live a life of repentance. We have to keep on repenting! Why? We have to keep on repenting because we keep on sinning. We need spiritual maintenance.

Do you believe this? For if you do, they are rejoicing in heaven over you. And there is going to be a big party or banquet some day in a different place and you are invited! But there are some implications to this. There are some responsibilities.

For God said to his Old Testament church in Ezekiel, "For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness."

And Jesus says to his New Testament church in various places in John 10: "I tell you the truth I am the gate for the sheep...I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out and find pasture...I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Well, how is God doing this on this day, Sept. 11, 2016? How does he plan to do this tomorrow and every day after tomorrow until that great last day? He wants to do it through us. We have a mission, individually, and we have a mission, collectively, to find those in our society who are lost, to find those who are wandering, and to find those who are living in spiritual darkness, to find the children who have not been baptized. Jesus is quoted in Mark 16 as saying, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." (Mark 16:15) And I assure you, that when we do that, we have been faithful servants and brought joy to our God. Amen.