

• Jesus spoke graciously and people listened willingly

Jesus was popular with tax collectors (corrupt and oppressive people working for the Roman government) and with sinners (people who were not welcomed in the synagogues). He was so gracious to them. They did not feel humiliated by Him. Although He often spoke of the need for repentance, sinners also felt that He loved them. They drew near to listen to Him very willingly<sup>□1</sup>.

□1 15:1

• Religious people lose sight of God's grace

But the Pharisees did not like it!<sup>□1</sup> Many religious people lose sight of God's grace. They begin by wanting people to be holy (that's fine!), but they often forget that it is the **grace** of God that 'trains us ... to live sober, upright and godly lives'<sup>□2</sup>. The Bible tells us to grow in **grace**<sup>□3</sup>. Religious people generally think we need numerous regulations in order to be godly. They have their version of the law of God – generally the Ten Commandments with various alterations and additions – and then they add to it (because the law does not seem to work they add more law to the law). The result is bondage and hypocrisy. The Pharisees were the greatest example of this kind of 'heavy' religion in Jesus' day. They did not like the grace of God, and they were critical of Jesus when He was sweet and pleasant to sinful people.

□1 15:2

□2 Titus 2:12

□3 2 Peter 3:18

### The Lost Sheep

So Jesus tries to help the Pharisees by telling them three parables: one about a lost sheep, one about a lost loin, and one about a lost son.

1. Jesus loved to go after the worst kind of person – and so should we

1. **Jesus loved to go after the worst kind of person – and so should we.** He put the matter in terms of a story. Imagine, says Jesus, a shepherd with a hundred sheep to look after. Sheep are such foolish creatures. They wander away and get lost. They get tangled up in thorns and bushes. They fall down pits and cracks in the ground. When that happens, the shepherd leaves most of his sheep to look after themselves, while he goes looking for the one that is in trouble<sup>□1</sup>.

□1 15:3-4

When Jesus ministered in this world, He concentrated specially on the worst sinners. Tax collectors and sinners excluded from the synagogue were of special interest to Him. He loved to go after people who really needed a Saviour. This is what the grace of God is like.

2. Jesus was persistent in seeking those who were in bad trouble

2. **Jesus was persistent in seeking those who were in bad trouble.** The good shepherd looks for the lost sheep, and he persists in looking 'until he finds it'<sup>□1</sup>. The grace of God does not abandon us or easily give up on us. The shepherd persists in his search hour after hour until he finds the wanderer.

□1 15:4

3. Jesus is like the shepherd in carrying those who need carrying

3. **Jesus is like the shepherd in carrying those who need carrying.** The shepherd, when he has at last found the lost sheep, 'joyfully lays it on his shoulders'<sup>□1</sup>. When at last he finds the lost sheep, it perhaps is worn and hungry and weak. The shepherd carries it back home. Jesus often carries us. He likes to **lead** His people, but when they are at their worst He has to **carry** them, and like a good shepherd that is what He does.

□1 15:5

4. Jesus is like the shepherd in calling for celebration when one wanderer is found

4. **Jesus is like the shepherd in calling for celebration when one wanderer is found.** The shepherd who finds his lost sheep 'calls together his friends and his neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me..."'<sup>□1</sup>. The shepherd gets joy over rescuing his wanderer. For the moment he is more delighted with the one than he is with the ninety-nine. It is the same even in heaven, says Jesus<sup>□2</sup>. Heaven is a place of grace. The Pharisees may not be rejoicing over Jesus' eating with wicked

□1 15:6

□2 15:7

people, but the angels are enjoying it! There is much graciousness among the angels.

## The Lost Sheep

• Persistence

• Looking in every possible corner

• God's graciousness

• People who are gripped by God's grace will themselves be gracious



To the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus adds the parable of the lost coin<sup>1</sup>. **It makes the same point, but specially emphasises the persistence with which Jesus seeks the sinner.** A silver coin was very valuable to the ordinary people of ancient Israel, and in the dark houses in which they lived a lost coin might be difficult to find. The woman of the house might search for hours looking for her lost treasure.

Tax collectors and sinners were often to be found with Jesus. He would spend a lot of time with them and would often eat with them. This is because He was making great efforts to win them for the kingdom of God. He was being like the woman who sweeps right through the house looking in every possible corner to find where the coin might have dropped.

Jesus is explaining His ministry to the Pharisees and to any in the crowd who might be affected by what the Pharisees are saying about Jesus. The Pharisees' religion is about law. Jesus' message is about God's graciousness. The Pharisees kept sinners out of the synagogues. Jesus drew them to Himself. The Pharisees were intimidating and threatening to sinners. Jesus was warm and reassuring and inviting.

People who are gripped by God's grace will themselves be gracious. The Pharisees were stern and critical of sinners. They grumbled when Jesus showed loving graciousness towards disreputable characters. That is because they themselves had not come to a realisation of God's grace in their own lives. When we see that we too can relate to God only because of His kindness and graciousness towards us, then we are delighted that God is gracious to us, and happy for Him to be gracious to everyone else. Hostility towards sinners is a sign that we think we don't need Jesus' salvation. Those who are gripped by an awareness of God's grace will always want more people to be added to His kingdom.

<sup>1</sup> 15:8-10

 <p><b>slices.org.uk</b></p>	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <b>Preaching Through The Bible (PTTB)</b> books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p> 	
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