

One day, outside our apartment in Tokyo there was a **matsuri**, a festival. A matsuri is more than a parade, it is a community-wide celebration.

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- These matsuri usually have floats called, **mikoshi**, which they carry on their shoulders they carry. Some of matsuri celebrate a season, or cultural tradition, and some celebrate some deity.
- These **celebrations create** a yearly rythmn, create identity and culture, and are just plain fun.
- I did not join in the fun because I was an outsider and because I did not know what they were celebrating.
- These festivals are **as deeply rooted** in yearly Japanese culture *as* Christmas and Easter are here.

The **ancient Jews** had a **yearly calendar** of festivals and fastings, too. These were **seasons** of celebration *or* weeping.

- Their **festivals** involved special sacrifices (Nu 10:10), the blowing of silver trumpets (2Ch 30:21) and celebrating with joy.
- **For example**, the festival of **tabernacles** (or booths), was a festival that honored both the harvest God provided and the beginnings of their wandering in the desert (Ex 23:16). 'This festival will be a happy time of celebrating with your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows from your towns. ¹⁵ For seven days you must celebrate this festival to honor the Lord your God ... for it is he who blesses you with bountiful harvests and gives you success in all your work. This festival will be a time of great joy for all (Dt 16:14-15 NLT).'
- Seven days of partying! Imagine that. A time of 'great joy.'

We have been looking at the underlying theme of joy in Luke-Acts. There are times to weep but today we we continue out look at joy.

- **Last week** we saw how **joy accompanies** the advance of God's kingdom.

- When lives are changed, when miracles happen, when demons leave, the **Satan's rule is being replaced** with the kingdom of God.¹

In today's message we are going to look at Luke chapter 15. It *encourages* us to ...

- **Welcome the outsider** – the poor, the unloved, and the sinner (Lk 14:13, 21, 16:20).
- Check for a **judgmental or jealous heart** (Lk 15:28-30).
- Celebrate God's grace. Let's rejoice.

Let's Rejoice

Luke 15



1. Background.

Joy is a very **important** emotion and attitude. We have seen that ...

Joy is ...

- Attractional. It is **missional** to live a life of joy. The way **our country is right** now, we *need to be people who have an attractional joy* all over us. 'You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy (1Pe 1:8 NLT).'
- A life connected to Jesus. **We were created for joy**. Such joy is only found in relationship with God. 'Remain in my love ... I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your *joy may be complete* (Jn 15:11 NIV).' Last week we added to our list.
- A **downpayment of our future**. Joy is the evidence of God's kingdom breaking in and a promise of what is to come. 'You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever (Ps 16:11 NLT).' **God's kingdom is both here and now**, and yet is not fully here until the end of time. Today, we add two more to our list:
- Expressed in community.² Joy can only be expressed in relationship with others. 'Rejoice *with me* (Lk 15:6, 9) ... *We must celebrate* (v. 23 NLT).'
- Begins with repentance. 'There is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents (Lk 15:10 NLT).'

¹ J. Lyle Story, *Joyous Encounters: Discovering the Happy Affections in Luke-Acts* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2018), 65.

² See, Pamela Ebstyn King and Frederic Defoy, 'Joy as a Virtue: The Means and Ends of Joy', in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* (2020), 1-24.

The **background** of today's message is that Jesus welcomed sinners which upset the exclusive and judgemental religious leaders. The **chapter begins**, 'Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. ²This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them (Lk 15:1-2 NIV)!'

- Luke 15 is **sandwiched** in between two stories that deal with meals: 1) a wedding banquet where crippled, poor, blind and lame are invited in because the cool people refused to enter (Lk 14:15-24), and 2) the poor beggar Lazarus who longed for the crumbs from a rich man's table (Lk 16:19-31).
- Jesus' **parables emphasize** that God's grace is for everyone regardless of their past lifestyle, status or wealth. *Everyone* is welcome at God's table.³
- Those who add requirements to God's grace – demanding conformity to social or cultural standards, or religious virtue signaling, or a level of wealth – will be judged and cast out.

You are very familiar with these three parables. The first one is also recorded in Matthew (Mt 18:10-14).

2. Lost Sheep, Lk 15:3-7.

'So Jesus told them this story: ⁴"If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it (Lk 15:3-4 NLT)?"'

- When I was younger, I was worried about the **ninety-nine being in danger** while the shepherd went looking – it was the wrong place to focus.
- We are to **focus on the love of a shepherd** who cares for each one and loves them 'with an everlasting love (Jer 31:3 NIV).' The one lost sheep is valuable to the shepherd.
- **You are valuable** to God – he knows your name.

""And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. ⁶When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep (Lk 15:5-6 NLT).""

- This is **the main point of the parable** the welcoming of the lost back with celebration.
- There are **times to rejoice and celebrate**. 'Rejoice with me.'
- Joy is so much **richer when shared** with 'friends and neighbors.'

³ 'Jesus hospitable and joyous welcome to the ... marginalized is paired with his inclusive table-fellowship', Story, *Joyous Encounters*, 83.

Then we get an unexpected peek into heaven: “In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away (Lk 15:5-7 NLT)!”

- Interesting. The **earthly repentance triggers** a heavenly celebration.
- God’s grace is too wonderful not to celebrate.
- Repentance restores us and ‘Show the incomparable riches of his grace (Ep 2:7 NIV).’
- ‘The **Pharisees and lawyers** *simply cannot* accept Jesus’ joyous and inclusive behavior.’⁴

The next parable is identical.

3. Lost Coin, Lk 15:8-10.

“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰ In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents (Lk 15:8-10 NLT).”

There are Similar parts:

- Central figure (shepherd, woman, father)
- Something lost (sheep, coin, younger son)
- A search.
- The lost is found.
- A joyous celebration.

One scholar says that there are ten expressions of joy in these three parables. Jesus is driving a point home for his listeners.

The final parable is very well known.

4. Lost Son, Lk 15:11-32.

“To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. ¹² The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

¹³ “A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living (Lk 15: 11-13 NLT).”

- The **sheep** is lost by accident; the **coin** is lost by carelessness; but the **son** is lost because of rebellion – the inability to conform to his father’s wishes.

⁴ Story, *Joyous Encounters*, 84.

We know what it means to be lost, don't we?

- 'We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way (Is 53:6 NIV).'
- 'For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Ro 3:23 NIV).'

'About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. ¹⁵He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. ¹⁷"When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, ¹⁹and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant (Lk 15:14-19 NLT).'"

This portion is a good place to **highlight how diverse cultures interpret** the bible differently. He was hungry because ...

- **Collectivist** societies highlight 'no one gave him anything (v. 16).'
- **Fatalistic** societies highlight 'a great famine (v. 14).'
- **Individualistic** societies highlight 'his money ran out (v. 14).'

But that is *not* the point of the parable. The details are **not that important**. They are only to help **evoke an emotional** connection. The point is ... this young man is apart from his father; it was his choice.

He **comes to his senses** (v. 17) – this is where repentance starts.

- *Unlike the sheep or coin, this **young man has a will** that must *want to return* to a proper relationship with his father.*
- Our **thoughts determine** our **desires**, and our desires *determine* our **actions**.

I love the **little self-talk he has prepared** for the moment he meets his father. 'I have sinned (v. 18).'

- The **first two parables** talk about joy in heaven because of repentance; **this celebration** will be on earth.
- Though it **does not say the word 'repent'** here, his actions and self-talk reveal true repentance.

"So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him (Lk 15:20 NLT)."

- This father's **love is unshaken** by the rebellion of the son. All that is important is that he has returned.
- This fictional father's love represents God's love for you and me.
- 'God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Ro 5:8 NIV).'

“His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’²² “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet.²³ And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast,²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began (Lk 15:21-24 NLT).”

- The son’s **homecoming meant that he repented**, he turned around and came home to where **he was created to be**.
- Friends, **God loves the sinner** *even before* they repent: ‘It is this divine love that makes the sinner’s repentance possible.’⁵

‘We must celebrate ... so the party began.’ This **whole chapter is an invitation to joy** because the sinner, the lost is found. God’s grace is too wonderful not to celebrate.

A sub-theme here are the boundaries ...

- **In Acts**, the Good News will cross from Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, to the Gentiles, and even the Roman boundary.
- So **here**, Jesus crossed the boundary of Jewish piety to welcome sinners and have them eat with him. He extends grace to them when they are undesirable.

Religious leaders like to keep people in their place, their boundaries.

- **When we welcome** outsiders we are ‘giving expression to the expansive grace of God.’⁶

They sound a lot like the elder son. “Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house,²⁶ and he asked one of the servants what was going on.²⁷ ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’²⁸ “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him,²⁹ but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends.³⁰ Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’³¹ “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours.³² We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found (Lk 15:25-32 NLT)!”

- Like the religious leaders, he thinks - ‘I’m the good boy. I obeyed all the rules. I deserve some fun.’

⁵ Story, *Joyous Encounters*, 88.

⁶ Joel B. Green, *Luke NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 569.

- We *don't know* what **happened to the elder son**. He either accepted the Father's grace is wonderfully rich and went in and celebrated, or he remained outside the celebration – self-righteous and alone.
- These parables were **an invitation to the religious leaders** to repent of their prejudice and cross over into grace.

Conclusion.

What does all this mean for us?

First, you might be like the **sheep** who just wandered off, or the **coin** that happened to get lost by accident, or you might be the **rebellious** child. Today is a day to be found.

God's incomparably rich grace is wonderful.

- We **are found** 'because of his great love for us (Ep 2:4 NIV).'
- We must **take the same action** that the lost son did, we must turn towards home, towards God and take the first step.
- You and I were **created for relationship with God**. One very old but accurate doctrine states: 'What is the chief end of humankind? To glorify God and *enjoy* God forever.' - Westminster Shorter Catechism, 1643-1652
- And we are **restored by his grace**. 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast (Ep 2:8-9 NIV).'

Response and Prayer.

Second, God's grace is too wonderful not to celebrate. Let's do it!!

'But the people of God will sing a song of joy, like the songs at the holy festivals. You will be filled with joy ... ³⁰ And the Lord will make his majestic voice heard. He will display the strength of his mighty arm (Is 30:29-30 NLT).'

Sing, wave flags, pray.