

Matt Henry
Luke 15:1-10
11 Sept 2022

“One Percent”

God’s grace and peace to you...

If your kid brought home a test with a 99%, it’d be on the fridge! If you properly budgeted and managed 99% of your money, you’d feel pretty good about that. If you were a bar of Ivory soap, which is 99.44% pure, you might even think you’re superior to the Dow scrubbing bubbles. So what is it with these 99 sheep who are left for the sake of the one lost sheep? You would think that 99% would be good enough! It is for many things, but not to a shepherd. Although, as an under shepherd, if 99% of the congregation were here, I’d be ecstatic!

However, there’s a sense of dissatisfaction on God’s part when His sheep are not all 100% safe and sound. Today, we are going to look at this well-known parable in Luke 15 and see what it has to say about individual worth, the heart of God and the mission at hand? Are you among the 99 or are you the one? By leaving the 99 in the wilderness, is Jesus saying the 99 don’t matter? No, not at all. Of course they matter but so does the one and that’s what we need to explore.

Luke 15 is called the lost chapter of the Bible. It’s not called lost because we didn’t have it at one point in time. It’s called lost because it has three

consecutive lost parables. The first two we heard today: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost brother. By telling these parables consecutively, Jesus is not only presenting the Gospel, but He is vindicating his association with sinners. That was their complaint. The Pharisees and scribes grumbled, “This man receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). This is completely true!

Jesus didn't just eat with them. He welcomed them. He hosted them. While it's totally acceptable for someone out of generosity and kindness to welcome in the less fortunate and feed them, that kind person would never eat *with* them. Sharing in a meal is a sign of acceptance and deep fellowship. To share a meal is to share in life. But Jesus goes even further: not only does he invite sinners to eat, not only does he eat with them, he hosts them. His hospitality, his grace could not be more offensive because instead of turning the sinner away, he says, “Come on in! I saved you a spot. Let me serve you and honor you.” This approach could not be more in contrast with the Pharisees. They really had made two fundamental errors: 1) they thought the sinner was beyond saving; they were too bad! 2) they thought they weren't in need of forgiveness, but were good enough already by how they lived; they were too good!. As a result, they lacked joy.

Luther sheds some light on the Pharisees then and anyone today who thinks they are self-righteous. He writes, "It is impossible to fill him who is full of his own righteousness with the righteousness of God. God satisfies none but the hungry and the thirsty. Therefore he who is satisfied with his own truth and wisdom cannot contain the truth and wisdom of God." This is why when the Pharisees saw Jesus dishing out the grace so freely, they chose not to repent, but to resent.

So let's define the 99. These are the righteous ones. How did they become righteous? They've already repented, they've already trusted their Savior. Heaven rejoices over them too.

By leaving the 99 in the open field, are the 99 made unsafe? Are they put at risk? No, they're already found. This is key. Because when Jesus sets up the parable, he asks, "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?" The sense is this a reasonable action. This is normal. This is what a shepherd would do. Find the one sheep at risk. So the shepherd has to go after it, seek it out. The lost sheep cannot find its way home. Some sheep are more solitary. It may even like the being by itself!

This last week, I made a point to be out and greet the preschool families on their first day of school. It was very cute. I saw backpacks that are the size of the kids themselves. It was a successful first day because some kids didn't want to go home. One mom came back from the parking lot to the backyard and playground and I asked why. She said, "My kids called my bluff. I said, 'I'm leaving' and they let me leave without them." So she had to come back.

Our shepherd makes a different kind of promise. "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you" so if there is separation, it's not the shepherd's fault, it's ours. To some extent, we're OK with separation. We have our toys to distract us. The experience of COVID suggested that isolation and separation from the flock was a solution. But spiritually, that's a problem. God made us to gather. It's not safe, it's not good to be alone.

But this parable shows us how relentless and persistent God is in His pursuit of us. He goes after the one that is lost "until he finds it" (v. 4). He succeeds in finding the lost sheep. He doesn't try to convince the sheep to come. There's no need to persuade. Nor does the shepherd give the sheep a stern talking to. He doesn't make the sheep walk home either.

In the ultimate warm fuzzy, he hoists the sheep up on his shoulders and carries the sheep home! He calls his friends and neighbors and says, "Rejoice

with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost” (Luke 15:6). Look at how much joy there is in heaven when the lost are found, when someone repents and receives the gift of forgiveness and life. And I like to think in their own way the 99 sheep are happy too. “Oh look, there’s Frank. Yaaaay.”

How many of you have ever gone through a fast food drive thru, place your order, pay for it, and drive away only to realize something was missing—maybe from the 99 cent menu. Sure, most of the items were there, but not all! That bothers you doesn’t it? In fact, it may bother you enough to go back and get what was rightfully yours even though you had most of your order. Now this is just food—things that cost 99 cents! Imagine how God feels about people!

Perhaps on this Rally Day/Ministry Fair, we could simply remind ourselves of the amazing gift of salvation. It moves the hearts of people, of course, but from what Jesus is saying, it sounds like salvation moves all the company of angels—and even God himself—to a great and abiding joy. And this over just one sinner who repents! “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance (Luke 15:7).

Humility is required in order to have fellowship with God. That’s what the Pharisees lacked. Luther wrote, “Only those who are sick require the doctor.

Only the sheep that is lost is looked for. Only the captive is freed. Only the poor man is enriched. Only the weak man is made strong. Only the humble man is exalted. Only what is empty can be filled. Only what is scattered can be [brought together]...”

“Therefore let us say to God, ‘Oh how gladly we are empty, so that Thou may be full in us! Gladly am I weak, so that Thy strength may dwell in me! Gladly am I a sinner, so that Thou may be justified in me! Gladly am I foolish, so that Thou may be my wisdom! Gladly am I unrighteous, so that Thou may be my Righteousness!’ (What Luther Says, 2097).

We need to have compassion for the lost. We are apt to write people off. It’s just 1% after all, even though our level of acceptable loss is probably much higher. The lost matter to God and He doesn’t hesitate to go after every single person. The church that gets what it means to go and care for every single lost one is a church that is captured by the heart of God. `

You can see why he sends us. “As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” As we go on this mission, let us go with the love of Christ in our hearts and in anticipation of joy whenever one lost person is found. If it’s cause for celebration in heaven, then it’s certainly cause for celebration here. The one

percent makes a difference. **It's not that 99% isn't good enough. It's that our God is 100% good.**

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Head (what?)

By using these parables, what is Jesus' message to the following groups of people:

Pharisees and scribes? Sinners? The disciples?

Why did the Pharisees and scribes consider it wrong to eat with sinners?

What about the 99? Are they put at risk somehow?

Heart (so what?)

What does this parable tell us about God's heart?

Tell of a time which you found something that was lost. How did you feel once the item was found?

Do we find or are we found?

Hands (now what?)

What is God calling you to do to befriend someone who is lost?

How does discipling someone increase your love and joy for people?

What can you do to encourage a fellow believer?

Good Enough?

Luke 15 = "Lost" chapter

Our gracious host

Pharisaical Thoughts:

- 1) a sinner is beyond saving (too _____)
- 2) self-righteousness is acceptable (too _____)

Luther: "God satisfies none but the _____ and the _____."

Ninety-Nine Sent Men, You

Who are the 99? Who is the one?

Separation is not _____.

What does the shepherd not do?

“There will be more _____ in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance” (Lk 15:7).

Humility and Humanity

Luther’s “Only and Gladly”

It’s not that 99% isn’t good enough. It’s that our God is _____ good.