

Luke 15:

by Welcome Detweiler

The sermon emphasizes the importance of rejoicing in the salvation of others and encourages the congregation to strive to be happy Christians.

Duration: 38:02

Scripture: Luke 15:6-32, John 10:11, James 5:20

Topics: "Lost Sheep"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the joy and happiness that spreads when a person trusts in Jesus as their Savior. The preacher suggests that the best way to make the world a better place is by bringing people to hear the gospel. The conversion of a lost soul brings rejoicing to the Godhead, heaven, and the individual who is saved. The preacher also highlights the importance of not giving up or becoming discouraged in the work of the Lord, as the devil tries to hinder Christians in their efforts. The sermon references verses from James, Luke, and the Psalms to support these points.

Transcript

In case you attended the service two months ago, you will remember that I showed a graph of our attendance in the last ten years, and it was just a bit discouraging. And I have been watching the attendance since that time, and I can bring you some good news. I think that our attendance thus far in 83 has been better than any of those previous years, at least four or five years.

So that is to encourage you. I hesitate to mention it because you might get complacent and say, well, now that we're doing all right, that's fine. But at least there should be that encouragement, which proves that it can be done, and I want you to be encouraged and still invite your neighbors and friends in to attend the services.

Turn please to Luke chapter 15, and we begin reading at verse 25. Luke chapter 15 and verse 25. Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatty calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry and would not grin.

Therefore came his father out and entreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment, and yet thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should be merry and be glad, for this my brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found. Very briefly, I must remind you that the entire chapter is an answer to the first two verses of this chapter.

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And our Lord Jesus Christ tells these Pharisees why he paid special attention, he received, and he ate with sinners.

There are very few chapters in your Bible that have as much rejoicing in it as this one. In the fifth verse, you have the story of the shepherd going out and looking for that one sheep that is lost, while the ninety and nine who are not lost, or do not consider themselves lost, are in the wilderness. Then you read, And when he hath found it, he layeth on his shoulders rejoicing.

And when he cometh home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. Rejoicing on the Savior's part, and his friends and his neighbors are called together to rejoice. And then he gives the application, because as that shepherd is happy over finding a sheep that was lost, recovering it, I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repented, and so on.

The second section is the lady who has lost one coin. Nine are still available, but this one is gone. And again you have, When she found it, she calleth her neighbors and friends together, saying, Rejoice with me, I have found that piece which was lost.

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angel of God over one sinner that repented. In the 24th verse we have the recovery of the prodigal son. This my son was dead, and is alive again.

He was lost and is found, and they began to be married. Our Lord Jesus Christ is emphasizing the far-reaching effects of joy when one sinner turns to the Savior. He is emphasizing this all through the chapter that heaven is cause to rejoice.

The Lord Jesus Christ, who is really the true shepherd, that is made known to us in John chapter 10, I am the good shepherd, the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. And if you want to go to the Old Testament, you have that well-known 23rd Psalm, The Lord is my shepherd. The Lord Jesus is made happy every time a lost sinner comes back and is saved.

But not only the Lord Jesus. The Holy Spirit was sent into the world to convict men of sin, and in that second section, the Holy Spirit is made happy. Calls neighbors and friends together and says, rejoice with me.

Then mentions again, heaven is affected. And of course, some have taught from this, and it may be true, that our loved ones who are in heaven hear the news of sinners turning to God and they rejoice in that truth, that another one has trusted the Savior. The Pharisees are people who do not rejoice in the Lord Jesus doing that, and that comes out in the reading that we had tonight.

Here we have the older son. The younger son is the one who asks the father to have the goods that belong to him, and he goes out and spends it in riotous living, and as we had it last Sunday morning, he comes to the end of himself, and he says, I will arise and go to my father and say, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight am no more worthy to be called thy son. Now he comes home, and there is cause for rejoicing again.

He has received them, assuring us that whenever a soul trusts the Savior, God the Father in heaven is very happy. It thrills his heart to think of someone else who has opened his heart and trusted the Savior. But the older son hears about the music and the merriment, and he asks the servant, What has happened? And they tell him the story.

Your brother has returned, and your father has done all of this. And we read, he was very angry. As we witness for our blessed Savior, we have to keep in mind that there are many religious people, just like these Pharisees, who know nothing about the story of God's saving grace, saving guilty sinners, saving whosoever will, regardless of the depth of their sin.

Now the first time you read this portion that I read tonight, you are liable to be a little sympathetic to this man. He had a right to say that. Here this wayward son comes back, and they open their arms and take him in.

I think he would have been happier if the father had not gone out to meet him. If the father had waited and said, All right, you've come back, and you deserve a good spanking. Let's go out to the woodshed.

I tell you, that older son would have been extremely happy had that been done. Really, the message of salvation by grace, humanly speaking, is not a very reasonable message, is it? Isn't it far more reasonable that God should open the doors of heaven and say, You that have lived a decent life, you that have been upright, you that have kept your sins to a minimum, I want to take you in and bless you. You deserve it.

And you that have sold out to the devil, have turned your back upon me, and have acted like enemies, you don't deserve to go to heaven. So, I'm not going to let you in. Now, doesn't that sound a little more reasonable? One of the things that we have to learn when we accept the Word of God as our rule of life is that, reasonable or not reasonable, we have accepted the Word of God as our basis of truth.

When Paul is writing his letter to the Corinthians, he says the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness. It is. The preaching of the cross says, I don't care how wicked you have been, I am ready to cleanse you.

I'm ready to give you salvation. I'm ready to forgive everything that you've done. I open heaven's gate.

I take you in. Now, to the human mind, that is foolishness. But then, to those of us who are saved, it is the power of God and it's wonderful because it's delightful that God, in his provision for salvation, did not provide that salvation for a certain class of people that he allowed whosoever to come in.

I guess if we had been standing under the shadows of the cross and see our Lord Jesus Christ suffer and hear those two malefactors cursing him, and then all at once see one of them stopping his railing and saying, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And then hear the response from our blessed Savior today. Shall thou be with me in paradise? Human reasoning says, you shouldn't have said that.

That man deserves to die and he doesn't deserve to be with you in paradise. But the message of salvation is, that man has a right to be in heaven. Jesus Christ died for him.

The meanest, the lowest sinner, has an opportunity of being saved. There are a number of people who have been angry when a sinner was accepted by our Lord Jesus Christ and taken in. You may remember in the story of Jonah, rather interesting, Jonah was called by the Lord to preach to a wicked Gentile city.

A large city. And Jonah says, I'm not going. And in the beginning, you're not quite sure why.

You just say, well, he's in a backslidden condition. But really, that isn't the reason. He tells us why he didn't go.

I'm reading from chapter 4 of Jonah. But he pleased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very displeased Jonah exceedingly. And this is after the revival broke out, and after he had preached the message of judgment, that city turned to repentance in a wholesale fashion.

I think you could call this the biggest revival on record in your Bible. It's just a bit larger than the day of Pentecost. A whole city of people turned in sackcloth and ashes, admit their need, and turned to God.

This is Jonah's response. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore, I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, and slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

Therefore now, O Lord, take I beseech thee my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live. Then said the Lord, doest thou well to be angry. Strange that Jonah should feel that way.

I knew what he would do. I knew he would forgive those sinners, and I would be embarrassed. Shame on you, Jonah.

Can't you rejoice when sinners turn to the Savior? Well, evidently, Jonah was in a backslidden condition. But he had that feeling, and surely that was true of this older son who was absolutely angry. There are a number of people who are saved, and when their friends who perhaps have lived a better life hear about it, they are angry.

I went through this in Pennsylvania some years ago when the gospel came into our section, and religious people attended the services and said, that's wonderful. That's preaching the gospel. But they were shocked.

A few church members got saved, and that's not supposed to happen. And that stirred up the religious people, and they said, let's stop going right now. This is nonsense.

They were, well, I don't know if they were angry, but at least they were displeased at the fact that a person who was a church member found out he was lost and trusted the Savior, and they were not happy at all. They were telling people not to go to those meetings because it's stirring up the whole community. That's the case of the Pharisees in the days of our Lord.

They were not happy when they heard of sinners turning to the Savior. This elder son is a picture of those who no longer rejoice in the fact that someone has come home who was astray. You will notice that he says in verse 37, thy brother is come, and thy father hath killed the fatted calf.

He never accepted him as brother. Further down, verse 30, he says, thy son was come. He said, he's not my brother.

He may be your son, but he's not my brother. I don't suppose that any of us as Christians have ever reached the point where we were angry when a soul was saved. I think we rejoice, but the degree of our enjoyment or the thrill of hearing that may diminish at times.

And if I told you that so and so were saved today, you'd say, that's fine. Another one's going to heaven. There was a time when we heard that, isn't that great? He would have spent eternity in hell, and he deserved it.

He's not going to be there. He's going to sing his praises in heaven from the mire into the choir. That's wonderful.

There is a possibility that we, by degrees, get to that place where it doesn't thrill us anymore when a soul is saved. One of the reasons, perhaps, for that is because we've been fooled a few times. People tell us, so and so was saved, and we start rejoicing, and then we found out that we heard the news a little too quick.

It really wasn't a conversion. It was just a reformation. I remember when I came to Durham, a lady who was quite a soul winner was winning at least one soul every day.

It was in the good old days when the milkman came to your house every day or every second day, whatever you told him, and a new milkman came to the house, and the first thing she said, I want to know if you love Jesus. And he said, yes. Do you know him as your Savior? Well, I don't know what you mean.

He died for you in Calvary's cross. Will you accept him as your Savior? And he had some more work to do. She said, yes.

Praise the Lord. She led another soul to Christ just that quick. And we rejoiced for a while.

Won every day, she led to the Lord. But after we followed those particular conversions, we were let down because most of them just had words put into their mouth. If the emphasis in this chapter is that God, the Godhead, is made very happy when a soul is saved, our attitude ought to be I would like to make God happy.

Imagine. I have the power to help make God happy? That's something to realize. And that's exactly what this chapter teaches.

Every one of us who are saved had the privilege of being used in winning souls for Christ. And every time someone trusts the Savior, heaven is rejoicing. The Lord Jesus is made happy.

And God the Father is made happy. We have that wonderful privilege. I guess we would be tempted sometime to organize a little bit.

Maybe even put on a contest. See who could win the most souls for Christ in a month's time. But then I'm not suggesting that because I think if we did, we'd have our eyes on the figures and we too would probably be calling some people saved that probably didn't fully understand it.

In our effort to make God happy, we have to recognize that there is a certain area over which we have no control and that is the work of the Holy Spirit. It's ours to present the Word, to tell sinners that they know how to be saved. If a person knows how to be saved, it's out of our hands to decide when they're going to be saved.

That's in the sinner's hands. But we should clear ourselves of this, that no one who has been working with us, who has been talking to us, who has befriended us, will go to hell because they didn't understand how to be saved. As soon as I can show a man what the Bible has to say about the way of salvation, I have a bit of release.

I have discharged my responsibility up to that point. And now, it will depend if the Holy Spirit is working with that one and that person comes back with some questions. But then I'm aware of the fact that there are quite a number of people that I know, with whom I come in contact maybe every week, and I have never taken the time to just talk to them about the way of salvation.

Do you understand? We must remember that while our Lord Jesus Christ was very much interested in sinners, He didn't ignore Pharisees. It's impossible for a Pharisee to be saved. The first step in conversion is to kiss your Pharisees goodbye.

A Pharisee will not admit that he's a sinner, so he can't be saved. But as soon as he takes the first step and becomes an ex-Pharisee, he's eligible for salvation. And sometimes we get fed up on religious people who express the fact that they don't believe they're sinners and that they're doing all right and they want to be left alone.

But our Lord Jesus Christ was interested in them, and I think we give them up too quick. I think we need to give them the Holy Scriptures that they need to realize that they too can be saved if they will trust this wonderful Savior. It was Peter who, in the book of Acts, chapter 10, was asked to go to visit Cornelius and his family.

At that particular point, Peter was not interested in Gentiles. He was a Jew, and those outside his fold were of no interest to him. And the Lord had to visit him by a special dream and bring him to that place where Peter heard from the Lord what I have, friends, called out thou common or unclean.

It's the same as saying, these Gentiles are included in that big word, whosoever. You stop working with a certain class of people. These people need to be saved, and Peter had the privilege of leading the first Gentile to the Lord.

I trust that conversions will still thrill us, that it will make our heart glad. I suppose if someone should ask you the question, do you consider yourself a happy Christian? I wonder how you'd answer that question. The best answer, the quickest answer is, well, I guess I'm as happy as the average Christian, and that soothes us, that satisfies us.

Doesn't that seem to comfort us? I am as happy as the average Christian. By making that statement, I am saying that my goal, the one that I'm looking at, are average Christians, and I have no desire of being above or a goal higher than the average Christian. I mentioned last Sunday morning, that two Sunday mornings ago, maybe it was last Sunday morning, when the prodigal left home and was ready to see that great big world, the devil was the first one to meet him and take his hand and said, come with me.

I've been looking for you for a long time. I'll give you what you want. I've got what you need.

And he led them forth. Now, I'm sure that the correct interpretation of the 15th chapter of Luke is that he is teaching the difference between religious people and sinners. And Christ's interest and joy in the conversion of sinners.

But, I've heard a few sermons where a second application was made, and I think that all Scripture permits us to use second applications if these particular things are endorsed by the rest of the Scriptures. And when I hear a sermon on the prodigal son representing a Christian, they give the arguments. He was a son when he left.

The relationship was there. So, it is a picture of a Christian going out on a detour, getting away from the Lord. Now, that is possible.

That is true to human experience. There are not very many Christians who can say, from the day that I was converted until today, my contact and my communion with the Lord has remained right up there at a peak. Not many of us can say that.

And if we can't say it, then we should ask ourselves, why do I allow things to creep in? Why do I go out on those detours? Whenever I speak to aged people, I wish I could tell them that they are fortunate in being as old as they are because now they have reached a point where the devil will no longer bother them after they have had their 80th birthday. Or after they've had their 60th birthday in Christ. I haven't found a scripture to back that up yet.

So I have to tell Christians I don't care how long you have been saved. I don't care how old you are. The devil is tremendously interested in you.

And his interest is not in taking you to hell because he knows he can't do that. But his interest is in having you live a mediocre Christian life. Included in that to be semi-happy when a sinner repents and turns to the Lord.

I have to check myself continually and say how is it that my desire to reach souls is not as it used to be. That I am now more tactful and afraid of hurting people's feelings. And so I soft-pedal things.

Do you remember the professional hitchhiker that spoke from this platform some years ago? George Wattmer. I shall never forget one of the statements he made. And I hope it sticks with me all my life.

Sometimes we are so tactful that we never attack. Let that sink in. We are so tactful that we never attack.

And there is a possibility that the devil is interested in us being just mediocre Christians no longer thrilled at the privileges of our hours of leading souls to a saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We may not recognize that Satan has his hand. In some cases he uses the fact that I am involved in my work.

My work demands tremendous attention. And we excuse ourselves by saying, if you had the kind of employment that I had you couldn't concentrate on the scriptures and remain as spiritual. This upon me continually.

Well, I'm not sure if that excuse will stand because I have seen some Christians who have had tremendous responsibilities who set priorities between themselves and the Lord and said, I recognize there is a devil. He knows my house number. He loves to visit me.

And he sneaks in. When I suggest that these fellows who preach there are some differences. There are not many Christians who just all at once turn their back on the Lord and go out into the far country.

The devil knows that that doesn't work. I've got to get them by the inch. Just a little bit.

And then a little bit more. And then a little bit more. I can't take them all at once.

I must take them a little bit so they don't even know it. If you are away from the Lord you're not supposed to know it. That's supposed to be a secret.

Only the devil is supposed to know that. You're supposed to be still content and say, as far as I know I'm in good spiritual condition. This is a rather sensitive subject.

Our own personal spirituality. My interest in the work of the Lord. My interest in the tremendous privilege of leading souls to Christ.

And I have to ask myself why is it that I don't have the same ambition? Why is it that excuses come up? Here's a person that I ought to know, but I know too much. And I excuse it. I didn't use to do that.

Here's a person that I have to keep after. I didn't trust the Savior the first time I heard it. Somebody had to keep after me.

And that's true in most cases. And I think we give up entirely too quick. The devil is interested in the work of the Lord in getting Christians to be discouraged or complacent or perhaps one of the better ways is to have your feelings hurt.

And just as soon as your feelings are hurt or you become discouraged or you become complacent then you're going to relax. And your key to interest in the work of the Lord is going to drop. This account of the Father in verse 24.

This my son was dead and is alive again. Verse 32 It was meet that we should make merry and be glad for this thy brother was dead and is alive again. If I could be engaged in raising people from the dead.

Today I was at a funeral in Danville, Virginia. Mr. George Edwards who was a leukemia victim since September died. If I had the power to raise that man from the dead and give him back to his wife and his daughter today that would have been tremendous.

I don't have that. But evidently I do have something. I do have something that will help a dead sinner have eternal life and that's even greater than raising someone from physical death.

I wonder why we are just a bit slow to believe that these promises in God's word are ours to enjoy. This older son may not be a true picture of any one of us because you are not guilty of ever hearing someone being saved and saying that makes me mad. So he doesn't fit you at all.

But it may be on a lesser scale you can say I am no longer thrilled about it. Just another conversion. They happen every day worldwide and it doesn't affect me anymore.

It doesn't make me happy. It doesn't cause me to rejoice. I want to leave with each one of you the fact that Jesus Christ is coming again and if he should and I'm sure he won't, if he should give us seven days notice send a John the Baptist to tell us seven days is coming back again I just would like to know what

you would do in those seven days.

I wonder. Some might say you know, I don't remember ever leading a soul to Christ. I have given facts out and I have brought them to the meetings and they profess but I have never had the privilege of sitting down with a person, opening the scriptures and that person, I see it.

They trust the Savior. I wonder in those seven days if you wouldn't say I've never done that. I want to do that before I go to heaven.

This is my ambition. I want to do that in these seven days. I have no idea that the Lord is going to give us even seven days.

But I wonder if there shouldn't be a sincere desire in our hearts. I have the privilege of contributing to heaven's happiness, to the Savior's happiness, to the Father's happiness, to the Holy Spirit's happiness by bringing souls unto the sound of the gospel and seeing them saved. The last verse in James' epistle is, let him know that he which converted the sinner from the error of his ways shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sins.

All through the word of God the conversion of a soul that is lost, turning to Christ, changing the destiny, no longer on the way to hell, on the way to heaven, that causes rejoicing. I've emphasized the fact that the Godhead is happy and that heaven is happy and I've overlooked the fact that whenever that takes place, the individual who is saved is happy and there are always some relatives who are saved and they are happy and the company of Christians in which that happens also is happy. Suppose I could tell you last Sunday morning five souls were saved.

Last Sunday night five more souls were saved and the Sunday before that 15 in three meetings. Do you know what that would do to the whole assembly? We'd start buzzing. Isn't it wonderful? Did you hear about it? Did you hear about it? It just lifts us, that very thing.

So this happiness that is spreading whenever a person trusts the Savior, the partaking effect of it is emphasized in this 15th chapter of Luke's Gospel. Joy in heaven. This suggestion in the last verse in James is that if I want to make this world a better world, we should be interested in that, I don't know of a better way to do it than to bring people under the sound of the Gospel.

You can tell sinners, now you shouldn't do that. That's a wicked thing to do. It won't change his heart.

He'll go back to it anyway. But if you can change his heart, bring him to Christ, he will change his whole life and others to the Savior. So I want to impress upon you the privilege we have as believers of bringing joy to our own heart, to the heart of those sinners that need to be saved, and to the Godhead by putting emphasis on the fact I want to be a soul winner.

And if I have lost my desire, if the joy of leading a soul to Christ is no longer there, then there needs to be confession in the sight of God. And that might be one of our prayer requests. Lord, restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee. When? When the joy of thy salvation again floods my soul. Sometimes in our prayer requests we are emphasizing those who are in the hospitals or sick, and we have a right to do that.

We should share those who are going through difficult times and rejoice with those who are going through happy times. But then we are also aware of the fact that there are sinners that are still on the road to hell, and we should include those in our prayers. Those at the County General Hospital are Velma Jones, Brenda Bizzell, Selma Upchurch, Lois Williamson, Lindy Poe, Deborah Wiggins, Louise Gilmore, she was there a few days and had to go back again, Mrs. Shirley Markham, and her mother, Christy Poole, who is in our Sunday School here, is in that hospital also, Albert Wimberly.

In the Veterans Hospital, Mr. Houston, that's Anna Mae Morgan's father, and in Duke Hospital, Ruby Worrell, and that's Grady Gregory's sister, and Victor Braswell. We also have word that Mrs. Josephine Hester's brother, Rufus Richards, is in a hospital in Burlington. Let's remember all of these, and also I learned that Tom Fardu, who we saw last week, is feeling some better, but this afternoon he broke his wrist again.

So let's pray for him. That's discouraging, I'm sure. As the Lord leads, let's spend the rest of the evening in prayer.

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