

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Luke 15:1-7

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. This week, we will read Luke chapter 15. Today, we will read verses 1-7.

Luke chapter 15 is perhaps one of the most well-known chapters in all four Gospels, especially the story of the prodigal son at the end. Even non-Christians have likely heard of it and are familiar with it.

So how did this chapter come about? Near the end of chapter 14, Jesus spoke very seriously about the conditions for following Him, giving three requirements for being His disciple. These requirements can be considered extremely demanding: anyone who does not love Him more than father, mother, wife, children, brothers, and sisters cannot be His disciple; whoever does not bear his own cross and follow Him cannot be His disciple; and whoever does not forsake all that he has cannot be His disciple. Many who heard such strict requirements would likely be discouraged and turn back. However...

Verse 1: "Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him."

What is remarkable is that these despised tax collectors and sinners, after hearing Jesus speak about the conditions of discipleship, did not leave. Instead, they came even closer to Him, desiring to continue hearing Him speak. They truly recognized their own condition and unworthiness, and were willing to draw near to Jesus, so that through His speaking they might receive more grace.

Verse 2: "And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

In contrast, the scribes and Pharisees—the upper class of Jewish society—saw Jesus with these sinners and tax collectors and began to complain. They criticized Him for receiving sinners and eating with them. What they cared about was maintaining their own so-called purity and avoiding defilement. When they saw Jesus associating with sinners, they began to criticize and murmur.

It was in this context that Jesus spoke three parables, forming three sections of one message. The first is the story of a shepherd, the second the story of a woman, and the third the story of a father. Although they appear to be three separate stories, they are actually one message concerning the repentance of a sinner, viewed from three different aspects.

The first story of the shepherd speaks of the Son; the second story of the woman speaks of the Spirit; and the third story of the father speaks of the Father. It shows how the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—works together so that sinners may repent and be saved. Let us now look closely at these three sections; today we will consider only the first.

Verses 3–4: “So He spoke this parable to them, saying: ‘What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?’”

Jesus used a familiar situation as an illustration. In that region, many were shepherds. If you had a hundred sheep and one went astray, would you not leave the ninety-nine and go after the lost one?

A sheep has no ability to defend itself. When a lost sheep is in the wilderness, its end is death. Therefore, the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine in the wilderness and goes to seek the one that is lost. Of course, the process of searching is difficult and dangerous, requiring much cost. Yet Jesus does not elaborate on this; instead, He emphasizes the result after the sheep is found.

Verse 5: “And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.”

The lost sheep, once found, is especially precious. The shepherd carries it on his shoulders and brings it home.

Verse 6: “And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’”

Not only does the shepherd rejoice, but he also invites his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him.

Verse 7: “I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.”

Through this parable of the shepherd seeking the sheep, Jesus speaks of Himself. In John 10:11, Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” We were all once that lost sheep. Jesus Himself came down from His heavenly throne into the world to personally carry out this work of seeking.

Although here He simply says “until he finds it,” in reality, this path of seeking is a difficult one. In John 10, He tells us clearly that “the good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” This path of seeking is the path of death—the way of the cross.

For a sinner to be saved, the Shepherd must pay the price of death. Yet in this parable, Jesus does not mention the cost He must pay. Instead, He emphasizes the value of the lost sheep in the shepherd’s heart.

God treasures every one of us. I believe that as He spoke these words, His eyes were upon those tax collectors and sinners: it does not matter that society despises you, or that the scribes and Pharisees exalt themselves—I am the good shepherd. For each one of you, I am willing to lay aside My heavenly glory and personally go into the wilderness to bring you back.

Although in bringing you back I must pay the price of death, bearing the shame and consequences of sin on the cross, these things do not concern Me. What matters

to Me is finding that one lost sheep. And when I find it, I rejoice greatly; not only do I rejoice, but I carry it on My shoulders and bring it home. If we reflect on our own experience of salvation, is it not just like this? Not only does He carry us home, but He also calls His friends and neighbors to rejoice together.

In fact, among all the gatherings in the church, the most joyful is the baptism meeting—it is a time of rejoicing for the whole household. For when one sinner repents, there is such joy in heaven.

The repentance of a sinner includes at least three aspects. First, he recognizes himself—he knows his unworthiness, his sinfulness, and that he is undeserving. Only when a person humbly sees his true condition can he come before Jesus. Second, he must recognize salvation—that all his unworthiness and all his debts have been completely canceled through Jesus' death on the cross. Though we cannot pay the price, we can freely receive His grace.

After recognizing himself and recognizing grace, he must acknowledge God's rightful place in his life. When we sin and do things displeasing to God, those actions themselves are not the most important issue. What truly grieves God is that we do not acknowledge His rightful place.

We were created by Him—He is our Creator. Yet we want to be our own master, refusing to acknowledge God's authority over us. That is why we go astray and become lost sheep. When we turn back, repent, and accept salvation, we are also accepting God's authority and restoring the proper position man was meant to have before God.

Thus, the whole household—including the angels and the heavenly host—rejoices and praises. What God values is the salvation of each individual sinner. Although only one out of a hundred sheep is lost—just a one percent loss—God does not look at it in material terms. Each lost sheep is precious in His sight; every life is precious.

We often measure the value of life in material terms. Especially the scribes and Pharisees thought their lives were more valuable than those of the sinners and tax collectors. But God looks at life itself. Every life is of great value in His sight, dearly

loved by Him, and He desires that each one would come to know their true condition, repent, and receive salvation.

Remember, when Jesus told this story, He was addressing two groups: the tax collectors and sinners on one hand, and the scribes and Pharisees on the other. Those who appeared low in social status were able to receive salvation, while those who considered themselves superior did not recognize their true condition, did not understand salvation, and did not acknowledge God's authority in their lives—and thus missed salvation.

Dear brothers and sisters, on the one hand, we give thanks and worship for the grace God has shown us; on the other hand, we ask God to have mercy on our relatives and friends who do not yet know the Lord. May we become a good testimony, helping those around us who do not know the Lord to be willing to humble themselves, to repent, to believe, and to receive Jesus as the Savior of their lives.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. You are the good shepherd who gives Your life for the sheep; we have all received the benefit of Your sacrifice. Thank You also for giving us the wisdom unto salvation. Help me to become a channel of Your gospel—just as You have saved me, may this testimony also help my friends around me. Bless my daily life, that it may be a life bearing a good testimony. We pray in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.