



World Christian Fellowship

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What makes God Joyful?

Luke 15:1-2

Luke 15:1-2, *Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."*

Last week in our study on Luke 13:34-35, on the cry of Jesus Christ the compassion of God through Jesus Christ.

The word of God says that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God cries through the Prophet of Ezekiel 3 times that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

God spoke through the prophets many times in the Old and New Testaments.

Ezekiel 18:23, *Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?" says the Lord God, "and not that he should turn from his ways and live?*

Ezekiel 18:32 and 33:11,
1 Timothy 2:4, and 2 Peter 3:9,

But we are going to look what makes God joyful for next few weeks.

When we think about God mainly, we think about His attributes.

They fall into two categories.

1. **Incommunicable attributes.**
2. **Communicable attributes**

1. **Incommunicable attributes.**

That is, those are things that are true of Him and Him alone. They don't get communicated to anybody else.

God is omnipotent: He possesses all power, infinite power, limitless power.

God is omnipresent: He is everywhere at the same time at all time.

God is omniscient: He knows everything that is, that has been, that will be.

God is immutable: He never changes.

God is eternal: He is from eternity to eternity the living God. Those attributes of God are not communicable. We don't receive those.

2. Communicable attributes

- ✓ God is righteous,
- ✓ God is holy,
- ✓ God is wise,
- ✓ God is love,
- ✓ God is compassionate,
- ✓ God is gracious,
- ✓ God is merciful.

All these attributes have communicated to us in a measure. As human beings we possess elements of those communicable attributes and as believers we have received an even greater portion of those things by the work of the Spirit in us.

We talk a lot about those attributes, God's righteousness and holiness and wrath and judgment and justice and on the other side, His wisdom, love, grace, mercy, compassion.

But one of the things that is true about God that we don't often talk about is His joy.

We get caught up in the fact that Jesus is "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," as the prophet Isaiah said.

We never, in the New Testament, hear of Jesus laughing, although we have already learned in Luke there was a time when He rejoiced greatly, in the 10th chapter.

So, we tend to sort of land on the stern, hard side of God and the grieved side of Jesus. But here in this great chapter, the theme is the joy of God.

God wants to share with us the source of His joy.

God told the children of Israel, who had now come into the land, that if they were obedient, they would be blessed and if they were disobedient, they would be cursed. God knew which they would choose.

Deuteronomy 30:1-10, *“Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God drives you,² and you return to the Lord your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul,³ that the Lord your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the Lord your God has scattered you.⁴ If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you.⁵ Then the Lord your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.⁶ And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to*

love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

⁷“Also the Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. ⁸And you will again obey the voice of the Lord and do all His commandments which I command you today. ⁹The Lord your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the Lord will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, ¹⁰if you obey the voice of the Lord your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

This is not about external religion, or superficiality, but about a transformation and salvation.

What brings the Lord joy?

Recovery of the lost. The salvation of sinners.

The prophets understood this.

Isaiah 62:1-5, *For Zion’s sake I will not hold My peace, And for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, Until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, And her salvation as a lamp that burns. ²The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, And all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name, Which the mouth of the Lord will name. ³You shall also be a crown of glory*

In the hand of the Lord, And a royal diadem In the hand of your God. ⁴ You shall no longer be termed Forsaken, Nor shall your land any more be termed Desolate; But you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; For the Lord delights in you, And your land shall be married. ⁵ For as a young man marries a virgin, So shall your sons marry you; And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, So shall your God rejoice over you.

- ✓ God's delight,
- ✓ God's pleasure, and
- ✓ God's joy

Found in the salvation of lost sinners.

God said it to the people of Israel when they were being told His instructions going into the land in Deuteronomy. It is reiterated again by the prophet Isaiah.

God spoke through the Prophet Jeremiah echoes the same thing.

There will come a time after Israel's punishment, after Israel's captivity.

Jeremiah 32:36-41, *“Now therefore, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning this city of which you say, ‘It shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: ³⁷ Behold, I will gather them*

out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely. ³⁸ They shall be My people, and I will be their God; ³⁹ then I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for the good of them and their children after them. ⁴⁰ And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. ⁴¹ Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul.'

God says I will rejoice over them with all My heart and all My soul.

What makes God rejoice?

The salvation of the lost,
The recovery of sinners, and
The rescue of those who are perishing.

Zephaniah, fourth book from the end of the Old Testament.

Zephaniah 3:14-17, *Sing, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem!*

¹⁵ *The Lord has taken away your judgments, He has cast out your enemy. The King of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; You shall see disaster no more. ¹⁶ In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: "Do not fear; Zion, let not your hands be weak.*

¹⁷ *The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save;*

He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

He's going to be quiet except when He shouts for joy.
This is the heart of God.

Jesus said in Matthew 25 to the faithful servants He said,
"Come, enter into the joy of your Lord."

Can you imagine being in heaven and having God shouting for joy over the fact that you are there?

Can you imagine, right now, because you are in His kingdom, He is shouting for joy and the holy angels are shouting with Him and the church triumphant around His throne is joining in the cry.

A party is happening in Heaven as we speak, and it continues to escalate every time a soul is saved.

Our Lord Jesus was a "man of sorrows" and He was "acquainted with grief," but He also knew joy.

John 17:13, *But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves.*

He knew joy. He knew joy even going to the cross.

Hebrews 12:2, *looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

What was that joy?

The joy of recovering the lost.

Heaven's joy comes in the recovery of lost sinners. Heaven's highest joy comes in that recovery.

How important is that in my life, the recovery of the lost?

How critical is that to me?

How do I find my highest joy?

Do you find the highest levels joy fulfilment and my delight and my pleasure that a sinner has been found and restored?

That should be our highest joy.

Luke chapter 15 can be titled as God's Joy Recovering the Lost.

The book of Luke is divided into three sections.

1. Part 01 Chapter 1:1 to Chapter 9:50
 2. Part 02 Chapter 9:51 to Chapter 19:27
 3. Part 03 Chapter 19:28 till end of the book at Chapter 24.
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1. Part 01: Covers introduction, Jesus birth, and His initial Galilean ministry.

2. Part 02: Jesus Judea ministry, Towards His journey to Jerusalem.
3. Part 03: Jesus arrest, death, His resurrection and commissioning disciples.

We are going to be in the middle part of Jesus ministry. In this Luke had written about the full teaching ministry of Jesus about the Kingdom of God. This part of the Gospel contains the intense teaching of Jesus with 20 Parables.

As I explained earlier the Parables are about the salvation and entering into the kingdom of God.

Now let us look in Luke 15:

What makes God rejoice?

when the lost are found.

This is the joy of heaven, the joy of God, the joy of angels, the joy of the redeemed in glory, and it should be our joy.

How different Jesus was from the religious leaders of Israel. Jesus rejoiced in the salvation of the lost because as God He possessed that divine joy that belongs to the Creator.

He is in stark contrast to the religious leaders of Israel, who have no interest at all in the lost.

Heaven celebrates when a sinner is saved, when a lost soul is found and recovered and restored.

We find our joy in this world in a lot of ways. But if you want to get in touch with God and you want to share the joy of heaven, you are going to find your greatest joy in the salvation of the sinner, in the recovery of the lost.

Luke 15:7, *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.*

Luke 15:10, *Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

Luke 15:32, *It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’ ”*

This is about joy. This is about God's joy, the joy of the holy angels that surround His presence and the redeemed and glorified saints that dwell in heaven. That God possesses joy is obvious.

Joy is a part of our lives. We know joy. We experience pleasure, delight, joy, laughter, happiness.

Where did Joy come from?

From the Creator, the source.

Romans 14:17, *for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

Joy is a component of the kingdom of God dispensed by the Holy Spirit to those who are in the kingdom.

Romans 15:13, *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

God couldn't fill us with joy unless He had some to give.
God, who is the source of joy, has joy in Himself to share.

David coming out of his terrible sin, asked God to restore to him the joy of his salvation.

Psalms 51:12, *Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.*

God rejoices.
God experiences joy.

Why things are the way they are in the world?
Why there was a Fall?
Why there is salvation?
Why God is redeeming people through human history?

Ultimately come to this because it gives God such joy.
God delights in the recovery of sinners.

God shares that delight with all the holy angels and all the redeemed and glorified saints.

Eternal rejoicing in heaven is going to be this endless chorus of hallelujahs because we have been redeemed. God finds His joy in the recovery of lost sinners.

Luke 15 our Lord tells three stories, but really, they are just one story.

It is the story of heaven's reaction when the lost are found.

- The first story is the story about a lost sheep.
- The second story is about a lost coin.
- The third story is about a lost son.

All three follow the same pattern:

- Lost,
- Sought,
- Found,
- Restored, and
- Celebrated.

That's the outline for all three stories.

- The first one is seven verses.
- The second is brief, three verses.

- The third runs all the way from verse 11 to 32.

Even though they are different in their length and the features are unique, the story really is the same.

We know these stories. We know the last one, perhaps, best of all.

How do we understand the parables?

1. Simplicity

All these stories or parables are very simple in nature.

First one is about a shepherd.

He has 100 sheep. One is lost and he leaves the ninety-nine. He goes and gets the one, he brings it back, takes it home and they have a party.

Second is about a lady.

She loses a coin, she searches for the coin, she finds it, she's thrilled, she calls her friends and they have a party.

Third one is about a Father.

The Father has got two sons, one goes away, after a long time he comes back to the father, and the father is so happy they have a party.

Jesus said it with one meaning, and it will remain the same for,

- every generation,
- every language,
- every culture

until He comes back.

Before we look at these parables, we will look at the background.

2. Context

A parable is sort of like a political cartoon. You can only understand a political cartoon because it's a cartoon if you understand what's going on in your society.

We won't be able to understand another era of history, culture until unless we know them. Otherwise we will have no clue.

The message was clear to the understanding listeners living together in a common culture in which the story originated.

It is a great a challenge for us. If we are going to get the clear meaning of these, we need to reconstruct the culture in its context.

People want to bring the Bible into modern times. There are people who want to update the Bible.

Honestly, I would say that it is not what you do when you convey the message of God. You don't bring the Bible into modern times ever. You take the people in modern times and put them back in the Bible. That is what I want to do, and I would earnestly request everyone to do as well.

That is the only legitimate way to ever interpret the Scripture because whatever it meant to them is exactly what it must mean to us.

Since there is such a huge gap between us and them in terms of time,

- culture,
- society,
- language, etc

We got to reconstruct that!

So, we know exactly what Jesus meant when He said it, to the people to whom He said it.

3. Layers

These are stories not allegories.

These are not with hidden, mystical, secret meanings that nobody could know.

There are layers.

All the parables of our Lord have layers.

a) First layer is that everybody can identify

They all knew what shepherds and what they did.
They all knew about coins and people losing coins.
They all knew about sons and fathers and inheritances.

b) Second layer is the Ethics.

These parables have an ethical issue that everybody would understand.

The ethical issue is:

Did the shepherd do the right thing in leaving the ninety-nine in the open pasture to go and find the lost sheep, pick it up, bring it back, restore it?

Did he do the right thing?

Did the women do the right thing, to stop everything, halt her life and go find that coin?

Is that the right thing?

Did the father do the right thing in taking back the son that wasted his inheritance?

When you think about all that the father had to give up letting the son do what he did and then to take him back, did he do the right thing?

The parables always have ethical issues.

c) Third layer is Theological.

Jesus moves from what they do understand to what they don't understand.

What are the theological implications of a shepherd finding a sheep and a woman finding a coin and a father embracing a wayward son?

What does this say about the kingdom of God?

d) Fourth layer is Christology.

Where is Christ in this?

We know the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son are lost people being illustrated.

We know the seeking shepherd, the seeking woman, and the seeking father represent God, the Seeker.

We know the celebration of the friends represents the joy of God and the joy of the angels and the joy of the redeemed.

But where is Christ?

Where's the Christology here?

In all these parables are invitations to salvation.

They are about salvation.

Telling a story about salvation, about being lost, being found, being restored and being celebrated by God, the angels and the redeemed, just telling that story in itself is an invitation for others to participate in that great reality.

Luke 15:1-2, *Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."*

The first two verses of this chapter trigger the whole thing.

Unless we understand that, we will not understand the actual meaning.

The Pharisees and the scribes despised tax collectors and sinners. They despised them.

Levi, or Matthew, gives a big reception for Jesus in his house. There was a great crowd of tax collectors and others.

Luke 5:29-30, *Then Levi gave Him a great feast in his own house. And there were a great number of tax collectors and others who sat down with them.³⁰ And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"*

They were always on this issue of Jesus meeting with sinners. As for as they are concerned that Jesus was always flaunting of the law, tradition and holiness. This was a serious issue to them.

Yet Jesus continued to collect these people around Him. The Pharisees wanted nothing to do with anybody in these categories.

a) Tax Collectors

The tax collectors were the worst because Rome was the occupying power, and the Jews despised the Roman occupation, and tax collectors were Jews who had bought tax franchises from Rome to extort money out of their own people to fill the coffers of Rome.

They were the worst of collaborators.

They were the worst of traitors.

They were the lowest of the low.

They were not allowed to socialize with other Jews.

They were not permitted in the synagogue at all ever.

They were unclean.

They couldn't engage in any social activity at all.

b) Sinners

The irreligious and the unrighteous and they considered to be below them. They never had any association with them at all.

We will find little later Jesus goes to the house of Zacchaeus and they start grumbling again.

Luke 19:7, *But when they saw it, they all complained, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."*

What kind of an attitude to do evangelism?

How do you ever get to these people if you are not willing to associate with them?

c) Pharisees

The Pharisees and the scribes were the **Haborim**.

They were the religious elite.

the tax collectors and sinners in that general category were known as the **Am HaAretz**.

Am HaAretz means people of the land, the earthy people, the lowly, the outcasts.

The Pharisees was that they were so pure, so holy and so righteous that they couldn't get near these people for fear that these people would somehow pollute them.

- Anybody who was ignorant of the law,
- Anybody who was ignorant of the tradition,
- Anybody who does not scrupulously tithe,
- Anybody who doesn't go through rituals,

Are considered as unclean.

Pharisee didn't go near those people. Pharisees essentially spent their time with only Pharisees.

They had an old rabbinic rule. It says this, "*Let not a man associate with the wicked, not even to bring him nearer to the law.*"

They were so worried about pollution that they didn't even take the law of God to the people who needed to hear it.

They spent their time debating the law and seeking to observe outward observances. They were exacting in their actions, but their attitudes stunk. Hypocrites, all an act.

They lived to impress each other; they sought the approval of man more than God. They were very self-righteous and manifested the common characteristic by condemning others.

d) Scribes

Scribes were the men who spent their time copying scriptures. They were considered the experts. They knew the original language. They considered themselves only ones capable of interpreting the scriptures.

What was said of Pharisee also true of scribe.

e) Meals

Focal point is at the meal table.

Meals were big deals.

They lasted a long time.

People reclined and stayed a long time, hours.

They would not invite anyone other than their own religious elite.

But they did invite someone with dropsy sickness, remember 2 weeks back we did study that in Luke 14 to test Jesus.

If a Pharisee would hire somebody to clean his house or to grind flour. That would be somebody among the common people, the **Am HaAretz**. The rabbinic law says that if you hire an **Am HaAretz** to grind your flour, you have a lady in there grinding flour in your house, if she's in your house grinding flour, as soon as she stops grinding, your house is unclean. As long as she's grinding, it's clean. As soon as she stops, it's unclean.

This was developed and codified in A.D. 200 in the Mishnah.

Where did they get this from?

Psalms 1:1, *Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;*

Proverbs 1:15, *My son, do not walk in the way with them, Keep your foot from their path;*

Isaiah 52:11, *Depart! Depart! Go out from there, Touch no unclean thing; Go out from the midst of her, Be clean, You who bear the vessels of the Lord.*

They pushed that to the absolute extreme!

Eating for them started out complex. They had to have all this kind of kosher diet.

They couldn't eat food that hadn't been tithed.

They couldn't eat ten beans and they could only eat nine and one had to be given to the priest at the temple.

The Babylonian Talmud lists things unbecoming to a holy Jew, and one is to recline at a table with an Am HaAretz, a lowlife. Here's one that just blew my mind.

Pharisees and scribes could not sit on opposite sides of a dining room, you know, at some event or some restaurant or some occasion. They couldn't sit on the opposite side of the dining room if anywhere in the dining room, even on the far opposite side, if somebody on the opposite side was eating meat and somebody else was eating cheese.

Now, you remember that in the kosher diet you don't mix milk and meat. That comes from the Old Testament law about not boiling a calf in its own milk.

So, one guy could eat all the cheese he wanted. Another guy could eat all the meat he wanted. That wasn't the issue.

You got one guy eating meat and one guy eating cheese.

But a Pharisee would have to get up and leave, because if he saw one guy eating meat and one guy eating cheese, they would mix in his mind and he would be guilty of defilement for having mixed milk with meat.

Absolute hypocritical!

Conclusion:

Two groups were sitting at the meal table.

- Tax collectors and sinners.
- Pharisees and scribes the religious.

- ❖ Tax collectors and sinners came to hear Jesus.
- ❖ Pharisees and Scribes came to condemn Jesus.

Jesus speaks to them these wonderful stories to unmask their hypocrisy.

A sheep, a coin, a son.

- One sheep out of a hundred,
- One coin out of ten,
- One son out of two.

The sheep is dumb and helpless.

The coin is senseless and inanimate.

The son is rebellious and wicked.

They all illustrate the condition of the lost.

The Father is always the seeker and He find the one whom He seeks. And heaven always celebrates. This is the joy of God in salvation, the joy of God in recovering the lost.