



THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP AND COIN

Part 64 of Luke's Gospel: Investigating the Man Who Is God

Pastor Mark Driscoll | Luke 15:1-10 | February 27, 2011

Luke 15:1–10

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ “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? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

⁸ “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever lost something that really mattered to you and you couldn't find it? You were searching everywhere for it? And then you found it. Remember how happy you were? Your keys, your purse, your wallet, your wedding ring, your kid.

Seriously, you ever lost a kid? That's a bad day. First time we lost a kid that I remember, I asked Grace this morning over breakfast—and some of you say, “Oh, my gosh, I can't believe you lost a kid.” If you have not lost a kid, here's why: You don't have a kid. As soon as you have a kid, eventually you're going to lose that kid and it doesn't matter what kind of eye you keep on that kid. They're like ninjas, they quietly sneak away. They just do.

When we were a small church we had lost our building and First Pres downtown took us in and they're a big church, big building. We just had an evening service there and I went over to Grace, I was like, “Hey, where's Zac?” This is when buddy Zac was about two or three, he was just a little guy. She said, “I thought he was with you.” I said, “I thought he was with you.” Freaked out, we're in the middle of downtown, homeless guys everywhere, people coming and going through this huge, old church. Your mind immediately goes to the worst possible place. I wasn't acting like a Calvinist. I was freaking out. I did not act like God was in charge of the universe. We're scouring every inch of the building, cannot find Zac. I'm outside running around downtown Seattle trying to find Zac. I can't find him. I'm freaking out.

I go back in, decided, “Well, you know, there's only place we haven't looked and that's the balcony that we never use,” because our church was so small we could meet in a Suburban. We don't need a balcony. It's not a big deal. I go up to the balcony, there's Zac, just hanging out. He's like two or three, just hanging in the balcony all by himself. A closed balcony that we never went in. “What are you doing, Zac?” “I'm in the balcony.” “Yeah, I know. Uh, I'm kind of wondering why you're in balcony.” “I could see everything from up here.” “Oh, oh, good for you,” you know? “Can you see your mom dying?” You know, like—well, I was really glad to have Zac back and this is how life works. We lose someone or something we really care about and then when we find them, what was lost becomes found, we're filled with joy. And God wants us to start with that kind of disposition, to know that for people who are lost, his heart is filled with joy when they are found.

RELIGIOUS SINNERS

And so Jesus is going to tell us two parables today, which are little stories that teach big truths, one about a lost sheep, the other about a lost coin, in Luke 15:1–10 where we examine the joy of God in finding lost people. The first one we'll look at is lost sheep, Luke 15:1–7, “Now the tax collectors,” bad guys, “and sinners,” other bad guys, “were all drawing near to hear him.” Jesus was getting really popular. “And the Pharisees and the scribes,” here come the religious guys. They “grumbled, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ So he told them this parable: ‘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? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, “Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.” Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.’”

So, Jesus is God. He comes to earth and he's having meals, which is, in that culture, building friendships with two groups of sinners. Now, the first group was upper-class sinners. The other is a class of lower-class sinners. The upper-class sinners, they're the tax collectors. These are professional extortionists and thieves. And they were hated and despised because they were ripping off their own people. The way it worked, this horrible, in the eyes of God's people, foreign government, the Romans, came in, took them over, subjugated them, imposed on them very high taxes, hired their own people to extract tax money from them, a percent going to the evil empire and the rest going to the tax collector.

Now, imagine in our day, this would be like the Canadians invaded us, okay? I didn't want to scare you so I picked something that cannot happen. But imagine for a moment all the Canadians got together and they all grabbed hockey sticks and stormed the border. And we didn't see it coming and they took us over. And next thing you know, everybody's saying, "Eh," and there's a bunch of French guys and things are really bad. And to help pay for this imposition from this evil empire, imagine the Canadians started recruiting members of our own church, people in your community group. And they allowed those people to be the tax collectors to squeeze as much money out of each of us as they possibly could.

You would be so frustrated and disappointed with the people who still claim to worship God but are ripping off God's people. They were so against the tax collectors that the tax collectors were rejected. They were not allowed to testify in court because they were seen as being so dishonest. And when they would go to synagogue, which was the old covenant equivalent of church, they were not even allowed to give their tithe, their financial offering. Hey, you know you're a bad person when the church won't take your money, amen? None of you are that bad, okay? Now, they were really bad though, that's the big idea.

So there are the upper-class sinners and then there are the lower-class sinners. And here they just call them the sinners. That's what the religious people call them. And these are just run-of-the-mill, regular sinners. I think of guys with their pants around their ankles and their big underwear hanging out, walking like pregnant ducks, guys like that. Guys in grills, gals in clear heels. You know, the normal. Guys smoking joints, going to Hempfest. People like this, normal, regular sinners living their life, not loving God, kind of ignorant and oblivious.

And so Jesus is having meals with these people. And the religious people come along and they say, "What in the world? Jesus says he's God, look at his friends. Look at his friends." And now, you think about it, it would still be controversial today. Let's say tomorrow we turn on the news and lo and behold, Billy Graham is hanging out with Eminem and Lady Gaga and they're going to Applebee's every Tuesday for lunch. A lot of religious people would freak out. They would say, "What is he doing? Is he sanctioning Eminem?" You know, "Lady Gaga?" I mean, well, the truth is, she needs to be born again another way. It wouldn't be—that was funny. It wouldn't be a bad idea but a lot of religious people, right, would freak out. "Oh, my gosh, Billy Graham's compromised his integrity." That's the kind of stuff they're saying about Jesus.

And Jesus knows they're sinners and Jesus hangs out with sinners and Jesus eats with sinners and Jesus never sins and Jesus never condones their sin, but he's trying to save them. And here's the truth, if Jesus never ate with sinners he would have eaten all of his meals alone.

And so the religious people stand back, as religious people commonly do, and they say, "Oh, well, there are upper-class sinners and lower-class sinners. Jesus, you shouldn't be eating with sinners." And the truth is, there's a third category of sinner called religious sinner that's self-righteous and hypocritical and judgmental and proud. And Jesus thus far in the book has already eaten with them a number of times and that doesn't bother them at all. And this is how it works when you're religious. You are aware of everyone else's sin, ignorant of your own. You judge God and his people for loving certain people, thinking that you're lovelier than they are. And so Jesus here is going to love, serve, and eat with all three kinds of sinners, upper-class and lower-class sinners and religious sinners who don't even know how sinful they are.

And at the end of the day, the religious sinners are going to prove to be the most sinful of all. When it's going to the position of betraying Jesus and crucifying him, it's not going to be the hip-hop guys and the gals in clear heels and the guys who are trying to get medical marijuana legalized that are the ones that are shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" It's going to be all the religious guys who think they're better than everyone else. So you and I need to be careful. We need to be careful that we always guard our heart against being religious and if you're here and you're religious, you shouldn't be proud of it, you should be ashamed of it. You should repent of it as a sin.

A LOST SHEEP

And Jesus illustrates all of this by telling a story. It's a parable. And he tells the story about sheep and a shepherd and a rescue. And so he gives them this story. He says imagine a man who's got a flock. And when we think "flock," we've got to think in terms of small business. In that day, a flock of sheep were your assets. A hundred flock is not enormous. Think of a small business. Think of a used car dealer who's got a lot with a hundred cars on it. Something like that. It's a medium-sized small business. Not super poor, not really affluent, middle class. And he says, now if you had a hundred sheep and that was your financial portfolio and one of your sheep wandered off, walked away, what would you do?

And he tells this story, this parable, saying a good shepherd would get someone to watch the ninety-nine sheep and go find the lost one. Now, this is very unusual because oftentimes if you had that amount of money you would pay someone to go find the lost one. But this shows a very loving, very concerned, very hardworking, very invested and involved shepherd. The shepherd takes it upon himself to walk for miles, to comb the hills, to look everywhere just hoping to find that lost sheep and bring them home.

And so Jesus says that that is an illustrative story for how God works. So we pull back from the parable, who's God in the parable? What's the role of God? Well, the shepherd. That means where are we in the story? We're the sheep. Okay, that's not a compliment. Okay, here's sheep, sheep stink, they get dirty. Are they a smart or dumb animal? They're dumb. Good luck trying to get one to fetch, right? If a sheep gets lost, they cannot defend themselves because sheep are weak.

Like, none of you are terrified of sheep, right? When our kids can't sleep at night, we tell them, "Oh, you're tired, here's the most relaxing thing you can do. Count sheep," right? None of you are scared of sheep. Sheep get in a fight, it's over. They have no talons. They have no claws. They have no fangs. They're fat, they can't run. They're awkwardly shaped. They tend to be a little mushy. "Baa," it's over, you got nothing. Like, tomorrow if you get up and you turn on your phone and you get a news alert that says in your neighborhood a truck has overturned and hundreds of sheep are on the loose, here's what you'd say, "That's awesome, I'm going to go out and pet one," right? You're kind of looking forward to that. Similarly, if it says hundreds of lions or bears have escaped, right, you're going to lock yourself in the bathroom and be in the fetal position, right? You're not going to go to work or the grocery store for a really long time till they find every one.

Sheep are dumb. We are sheep. Some of you go, "What are we?" Thank you for illustrating my point. We are sheep. It'll get worse, just hang in there. We are sheep. We tend to be dumb. We tend to wander. We tend to stray. We tend to get in trouble. And you know what sheep do? Nothing. And they never find their way home. And if a sheep strays away from the flock and the shepherd, they are in grave danger. They're in grave danger.

And Jesus says we're like sheep. In fact, that's what the Bible says. Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way." The picture of sin here is that, "Baa," we just kind of, "Hey, look, Jack Daniel's! Bye, Jesus!" We just walk away toward some sort of sin or temptation. We just kind of get silly and lazy and foolish and we wander off. And we're in real trouble. And there we are. We can't find our way home. We don't know where our shepherd is. We're in danger, now we're dirty. We're bloodied up, we're battered, we're terrified, we're alone.

And Jesus Christ is a good shepherd. That's what he says in John 10, "I am the good shepherd." Our God comes down looking for us. And here's the truth, we're lost. God's not lost. We walked away from God. God didn't walk away from us. We're responsible and he's a savior.

So unpack this story a little bit with me. Think it through. Now when Jesus says he's a good shepherd, we can't immediately go to the wonderful picture of shepherds that we have. If you grew up in church, you're like, "Oh, David is a shepherd boy," and you got a staff and you were a shepherd. And you took the cotton balls and glued them on the paper in Sunday school class to make the sheep, right? So we tend to think positively of shepherds. In that day, they were pretty weird. A shepherd was the kind of job you didn't shoot for, you fell into. Right? Because if you think about it, does a shepherd live in the city or out roaming in the hills alone? Roaming in the hills alone. So does a shepherd interact with people? Uh, no, they talk to sheep. Now, that's peculiar. Oh, do they bathe a lot? Mm, once every year, maybe, because they're out in the woods. So are their social skills great? Not so much. Where do they sleep? Wherever the sheep end up eating. I saw this when I was in Israel. We'd be out touring, you can go out to the middle of nowhere, there's nothing around, and some guy walks out with sheep. They're still there. I'll just tell you, those are some weird dudes. Okay, so in that culture, the shepherd was perceived as not necessarily a bad guy, but just kind of a peculiar guy.

And Jesus says, "I'm the shepherd." And what that means is that God became a man and he took a lowly job, a humble job. He wasn't rich, he was poor. He didn't live in a mansion, he was homeless. He didn't have an easy life, he had conflict all the time. And he's a good shepherd. It shows us the humility of Jesus to even identify himself with a job that was not highly esteemed in the culture of his day. And Jesus is a good shepherd and he comes looking for his lost sheep.

Now this is great news. For us as Christians, this should be very humbling. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, we're the lost sheep. We don't find Jesus, he finds us. Furthermore, there's nothing to brag about. Some of you say, "Oh, I'm pretty smart." For a sheep! Some of you say, "I'm pretty tough." For a sheep! For a sheep, that's not that tough. That's like being tough for a Tupperware salesman. It's just not that tough. We're not tough, we're not smart, we're not good, but we have a good shepherd.

And the story is that he goes and finds the sheep, and this is days of walking and hiking and looking and working. And as soon as he finds the lost sheep, he picks up the sheep, the story says, and he puts the sheep on his shoulders, maybe weighing upwards of a hundred pounds, and he hikes the miles that is required back to the flock. I want you to see your relationship with Jesus and your salvation like that. Jesus literally put us on his back, right? He carried a cross. He literally carried a cross weighing about a hundred pounds. He did so carrying our sin on his back to do all the work to bring us back to God. Salvation is Jesus literally bearing us and our sin on his back. And he does all the work to bring us back.

And so what every lost sheep needs, number one, a good shepherd, number two, a flock. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. Do you know Jesus? Do you love Jesus? Do you belong to Jesus? Additionally, every sheep needs a good flock. You need a church with God's people. We're not going to make it alone. We're built for community. We tend to wander off and stray and get into danger like a lost sheep. That's where the flock helps us. Stay with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Stick at your campus. Stick at your community group. Stick in your Redemption Group. Stick in your relationships. And that is how God, the Good Shepherd, keeps us in his flock, keeps us on his path, so we don't stray off into death and danger. How's it going? Do you know your shepherd and are you part of the flock?

And some of you have strayed far. Some of you have strayed quite far. Some of you have strayed for years. You've walked away from God and his people. You've turned your back on the shepherd and you're no longer in real community with the rest of the sheep. Some of you, this is new for you. You've walked a few steps away from the shepherd. You've walked a few steps away from the flock. Those who have wandered far and been beaten up and had their lives endangered and fallen into sin and death, they would encourage you and exhort you, get back to the shepherd, get back to the flock.

And here's the good news: the shepherd is right there, ready to pick you up. You don't have to walk yourself back or work yourself back or will yourself back. Just turn around, the shepherd's there to pick you up. Jesus is willing to forgive us all. Jesus is willing to embrace us all. Jesus is willing to love us all. Jesus is willing to serve us all. Jesus is there for us all. And it doesn't matter what you've done and it doesn't matter how far you've strayed and it doesn't matter how long you've been away from the shepherd and the flock. He'll take you back right now. Jesus loves you, Jesus misses

you, Jesus came to earth for you, and Jesus is waiting to pick you up and to take you back.

TRUE REPENTANCE

And now what this requires of us is to repent. And repentance is follow the shepherd. That's all repentance is. Sin is where we turn our back on the shepherd and we wander off into trouble. Repentance is turning around and saying, "Once Jesus picks me up, puts me back in the flock, I'm going to stay with the flock and I'm going to walk with him." That's repentance, it's walking with Jesus and his people for the rest of your life.

And so Jesus is going to use in both parables this word "repent," "repentance." And let me explain to you briefly what that is. It's confession, contrition, and change. Those are the three aspects of repentance.

1. CONFESSION

Confession begins with your mind and your mouth. You look at your life and who you are and where you're going and what you're doing, and you think about it and you realize, "This is wrong. I'm going the wrong direction. I'm doing the wrong things. I'm getting in trouble. This is walking away from Jesus and his people, not toward them."

And you confess that with your mouth. In prayer, you talk about this to God. "Lord, I've sinned, I've strayed, I'm in trouble. I don't know how to figure it out. I don't know how to get back. Please come pick me up." Okay, you know what a Christian needs? Someone to come and save and rescue them. His name is Jesus. A lost sheep is like a lost kid. All right, just cry out for a parent to come pick you up and make it all better.

It begins in the mind. You understand you're in trouble and it moves to the mouth, you cry out to God. You also cry out to his people. You pick up the phone, you call your Christian friend or friends, parents, family, "I'm in trouble, it's not going good. Can we get together and talk? I need you to pray for me. What I've done is not good and where I'm going is not safe."

2. CONTRITION

Number two, it's contrition. This is your emotions and your expressions. It really bothers you, your sin, your folly, your rebellion, your wandering. And it leads to expression. You can tell that someone is grieved by what they've done. It's a heartfelt sadness. It's looking at the shepherd and saying, "Jesus, I walked away from you. I sinned against you." Looking at the flock, saying, "I abandoned you, I ignored you. I didn't take your counsel. I refused your help."

3. CHANGE

And that leads to change. In your will, you want to have a different life, and your works, out of your new desires comes a new life. "I want to walk with God and his people. And by the grace of God, I'm going to walk with God and his people." That's true repentance: confession, contrition, and change.

WHEN WE REPENT, GOD REJOICES

And what does he say the emotional state is of God when we repent? Some of you think when you repent God is just furrowed brow, pointed finger, shaking his head, just shaming you and guiltting you. "I told you not to do that. I told you so. You blew it. Why don't you ever listen to me?" Some of you have that concept of God. Let me tell you, that's not the God of the Bible. Yes, the God of the Bible is grieved when we sin. Yes, the God of the Bible is grieved when we stray. And the God of the Bible is filled with joy when we repent. This includes repentance for salvation, when we become a Christian, and any repentance throughout the course of our life. When we repent, God rejoices. When we repent, God rejoices.

God is happy to love. God is happy to save. God is happy to pursue. God is happy to forgive. That's exactly what it says here. Verse 7, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons," quote unquote, "who need no repentance." Jesus looks at the religious people, says, "You guys don't make God happy at all because you never repent." Isn't that amazing? God isn't just happy by our religiosity. He's happy by our repentance. He's not happy when we boast of all the good things we've done. He's happy when we're honest about the sins we've committed. When we repent, God rejoices, he's happy!

Now this also should affect our disposition. When someone sins against us, we need to forgive them and rejoice. Be happy, be glad, not say, "I can't believe you did that. I can't believe you said that. I told you so. You've failed me. You blew it again. I'm so disappointed." No, say, "I'm grieved, but welcome back. I'm so glad that you've seen that because now I feel like we're close again." God is happy. God rejoices when we repent. Have you repented? What have you not repented of? What joy are you withholding?

And see, all of this is what the Bible calls good news. Religion has no good news to offer. The word "gospel" literally means good news. This is good news. But see, what religion would do, religion would come up to a lost sheep and say, "You're dirty and you're stinky and you're lost. You're a little beat up and bleeding." And the sheep would say, "Yeah, I know." That's not good news. "What do I need to do?" "Oh, well, here's what you need to do. You need to clean yourself up. You need to get your act together. You need to maybe reincarnate or go to Mecca. You need to do better, try harder. You need to find your way back to God. You got to walk all the way there. Good luck finding him."

That's not good news. That doesn't help a sheep at all. "Baa. I got nothing." Right? "I don't know where the shepherd is. I can't clean myself. I don't know if you noticed this, I have hooves. Additionally, along the way, it's dangerous. I'm not very tough. I don't know where the shepherd is. I'm lost, I can't find the flock. Plus, I'm bleeding." How many of you, that's how life feels?

And religion just comes along and says, “You blew it, good luck, fix it.” Jesus comes along and says, “I’m here. I’ll pick you up and carry you home.” That’s good news. That’s really good news. That’s really good news. Do you know Jesus? He’s the best. There’s nobody like him. There’s nobody like Jesus. He’s a good shepherd.

A LOST COIN

He goes on to tell this same truth in a second parable. He transitions from a lost sheep to a lost coin. Luke 15:8–10, “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me.’” There it is again, repentance and rejoicing. “For I have found the coin that I had lost.” Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

So here the story is, there’s a woman. Maybe she’s single, widowed, we do not know. She probably lives in a typical home in that day, which is about the size of a one-car garage. Next time you pull into a parking stall, think, in the days of Jesus as well as many places on earth today, that’s the size of the average home. They didn’t have the kind of windows and doors and insulation that we do today, and so it tended to be just thick walls, really dark, probably dirt floors, maybe a little straw on the bottom. This is a simple, humble, peasant home.

And in it lives a woman who doesn’t have a bank account and a huge investment portfolio and a credit card. What she has for the sum total of her wealth that she has to dole out carefully for her expenses are ten silver coins. These ten silver coins are the equivalent to a laborer’s day wage in that cultural context. So it’s almost impossible to attach a modern-day value to it, but let’s say it’s like 100 bucks. She has ten of these, so her aggregate wealth is about \$1,000. And see, she somehow drops one of the coins and she needs to find it.

So what does she do? She gets her lantern in her dark home and she’s down on the floor. She’s going through everything. She’s looking underneath all of the furniture. She’s checking every square inch of the house until she finds that coin. How many of you, you drop a \$100 bill, you’re looking for it? Right, even you’re Puff Daddy, you drop a \$100 bill, you’re looking for it. You drop a quarter, you maybe let that go. Hundred dollar bill? You’re looking for it.

In the story, who represents God? The woman does. The Bible says God is not male or female, he’s made us male and female in his image and likeness, but here God bestows some particular dignity on the women. He shows us in this story that he includes women in his instruction for our example. Luke’s gospel includes more women than any other gospel. The women that Luke includes tend to be some very godly, wonderful, sweet, helpful women, as well as some women who are tormented and suffering, whom Jesus heals and delivers. And the truth is, in Luke’s gospel, the women aren’t really the problem. It tends to be the religious men who are the real problem. We see that the women tend to gravitate toward Jesus and the religious people tend to fight with him. And here we see Jesus using a woman as an example to encourage all women.

And he says that God here is like this woman and that we therefore are like what? The lost coin that God is searching for, that God is committed to, that God is devoted to finding. Every time you take out change, currency, I want you to remember, “I’m like a lost coin.” Every time you drop a coin and go to pick it up, remember Jesus’ words. God treats you like you treat that coin. As you pick it up, remember, that’s how God saves you. That’s how God saves me. That’s how God saves us.

And some would say, “Oh, you need to find God.” You don’t need to find God any more than the coin needs to find the woman. You can’t find God any more than the coin finds the woman. It would be a very foolish coin if it was boasting to all the other coins, “Yeah, I picked myself up, flipped myself back up off the floor into the purse.” The other coins would say, “That’s not how that works. We were there. She picked you up.” That’s how salvation works. We sin, we’re spiritually dead. We don’t save ourselves. We don’t know God. We don’t pursue God. God knows us. God pursues us. God literally, in Jesus Christ, he picks us up because he cares about us. And some of us, he’s been looking for for a really long time, but he doesn’t give up his search. God never gives up his search for his people. He searches until he finds them. That’s the big idea of the story.

OUR GOD IS A GOD OF OUR REPENTANCE AND HIS REJOICING

And when God finds his people, how does he feel? Joyful, really joyful. You need to know that God is happy when we repent. Here’s what it says, verse 10, Jesus says, there’s no higher authority than his, “There is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” Now, some of you may have heard this almost accurately. Some of you have been told, “Oh, when someone repents of sin, when someone turns to trust in Christ, when someone becomes a Christian, the angels rejoice in the presence of God.” Have you heard that? It’s not quite accurate. We just read, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels when a sinner repents. That is, to become a Christian, grow as a Christian, mature as a Christian, any sin that we repent of, God throws a party about. God rejoices, God is glad, God shouts in gladness. And it’s in the presence of the angels. So the angels watch. See, normally it is the angels who are rejoicing in the presence of God. They’re honoring, worshiping, glorifying God. And when we repent, as sinful as we are, God rejoices. And all of the angels, as it were, perhaps they’re even silenced for a moment, and God explodes in enthusiastic joy.

Some of you have struggled to repent of sin. Some of you have resisted repenting of sin. Some of you are religious and you strain to repent of sin, to say things like, “I was wrong and I am sorry and God and people, please forgive me.” And some of you would wonder, “If I come to God and tell him what I’ve done, how would he respond?”

Well, I’ll tell you two things. Number one, he already knows. Let me just get that off—you say, “I can’t tell God. What will he think?” Well it’s not like you’re going to go to God and say, “Here’s how it is,” and he’ll say, “You’re kidding me. You’re kidding me. I took a nap. I missed it, I had no idea.” No, he knows and, number two, he rejoices in our repentance. He rejoices in our repentance. So we should rejoice in our repentance and we should rejoice in the repentance of others.

And some of you may come here, you may think, “I need to be religious. I need to be a good person, and if I’m not a good person I need to fake it and I need to hide it.” No, confess it, repent of it, and let us rejoice with you because our God is a God who rejoices. Our God is not a God of religion. He’s a God of repentance and rejoicing. Don’t you love that? He’s not a God of religion. He’s a God of our repentance and his rejoicing.

God loves to forgive. You’ve not gone too far. You’ve not done too much. Jesus is looking for you. Some of you, he’s been looking for a really long time. And he’s here to find you. And as Jesus saves and as Jesus forgives and as Jesus transforms and God rejoices, we are given this wonderful opportunity to share in the joy of God by telling people about Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and by seeing him pick them up and their sin and shame and carry them back to God and put them in the flock.

STORIES OF CHANGED LIVES

So I thought it would be fun, because one of the coolest parts of my job, I actually love this part—I love my job. But I really love this part of my job, seeing non-Christians become Christians and seeing Christians help non-Christians become Christians. It’s the coolest thing in the world, it’s the best. So I posted on the Ballard City group yesterday, just last night. I said, “Hey, if you’ve become a Christian recently, last year, or you’ve introduced someone to Jesus and he’s used you to help others meet him, write up your story.” I’ve got pages, let me give a few to you. Don’t you love hearing stories of changed lives? It’s the best. We never want to be a church just for all the sheep. We want to be a church that welcomes all the lost sheep to come back to the flock.

Nineteen-year-old kid, he says, “I grew up in a neglectful, abusive, orthodox Jewish family. I practiced witchcraft, demonism, symbolism and incubism and succubism for a really long time, knowing what they were.” Dropped out of high school, drugs, demons, the occult, darkness, trouble. His parents didn’t know what to do with him. They kicked him out of the house on Easter. What happens is he ends up meeting Jesus, God changes his heart and life. He ends up at the Mars Hill University District campus. He’s allowed back into high school so that he could finish. He’s getting discipled and right now he’s living in a Christian guy’s house with a bunch of buddies who are walking with him as a little flock to help him stay out of trouble. Changed life, nineteen-year-old kid. *[Applauding]*

Here’s another one. There’s a brother who is a Christian. He’s got a sister who’s not a Christian. And he was really worried about her. They’re at the Federal Way campus. And he kept talking to her about God and she didn’t really get it and she didn’t get Jesus. So he thought, “Okay, I’m going to try again. I’m going to pray for her, have others be praying for her.” And he took her out to lunch at Ruby Tuesday’s. Okay, can the Good Shepherd go to Ruby Tuesday’s? Yes. You know you’re elect if you get saved at a Ruby Tuesdays, amen? Yeah, some people, “Oh, how did you find God?” “I went to Mecca.” Others? “I went to Ruby Tuesday’s.” You know? “In fact, the Good Shepherd just came to hang out with me.” And he’s sitting there, he explains, he said, “I was sitting there talking to my sister about Jesus.” And he said, “I could see the Holy Spirit just open her understanding.” By the end of the conversation she was literally telling him, “Hey, brother, I would like to be a Christian.” He got to actually introduce his own sister to Jesus in Federal Way over lunch at Ruby Tuesday’s and today is her first day at Mars Hill Church, so welcome. *[Applauding]*

This one is really cool. There was a brother, he had a little sister who was still in high school, moved out of her parent’s house with a very violent, abusive, troubled guy who harmed her, abused her. He eventually was arrested and went to jail. Bad guy. And the big brother is really worried about his little sister. Some of you, this sounds familiar, right? So he asks his community group, gets the flock together, “Please pray for my sister, she’s a lost sheep.” He’s praying for her, the parents are saying she needs rehab, she needs medication, she needs all of these things. Maybe, maybe not. What she needs first, she needs to be found because this girl is lost. He’s sitting at home. His sister comes down the stairs, she looks at him and says, “I was reading my Bible. I decided I love Jesus and I want to be a Christian.” Can the Good Shepherd go to somebody’s house and hang out in their living room and change their heart? Yes. How happy do you think this brother was? How many of you, emotionally, man, if it was your brother, your sister, your mother, your father, member of your family, you’d be so thrilled? He was so happy. You know who was happier? God. As happy as we get, God gets happier. As joyful as we are when someone gets saved, God is more joyful.

Here’s another one, another Federal Way campus. This guy works at a retirement home with a number of senior citizens, and he talks to them about Jesus. And he’s got a ministry there. It’s very cool, he’s down at the Federal Way campus. He said that he was talking to one guy about Jesus and there was an older guy named Gerald who was in his eighties, right? So this is a guy, if Jesus gets him, it’s been a long hunt to track down this guy. This guy’s name is Gerald. And Gerald is sitting there and says, “Hey, what are you guys talking about? Are you talking about Jesus? I got questions about Jesus.” “Well, come on in, come on in, Gerald,” which is the most awesome name ever, “Come on in, Gerald.” And so Gerald says, “I need to know more about Jesus.” Okay, so the guy from Mars Hill runs out to his car, gets one of those free Bibles we give away, hands it to him, says, “Read John.” Short time later Gerald comes to him, says, “I read John, pretty awesome. What do I read now?” And the guy says, “Keep going until you hit something called Concordance. Just keep reading, there’s all kinds of good stuff in there.” So Gerald keeps asking all these questions about Jesus. And this man in his eighties prays to receive Christ and give his life to Jesus and the Good Shepherd shows up at the retirement home and saves Gerald. *[Applauding]*

Two other cool parts of the story. The first thing he asks is, “Now that I’m a Christian, do I have to be a Republican?” That was his first question, which is awesome. Not at Mars Hill. We always vote for Jesus. We always do the write-in candidate. We’re always voting for the same guy. What was interesting, too, then is a few months later, Gerald’s son Tim shows up at the retirement home. And Tim was a Christian who had been praying for his dad for forty years. Isn’t that awesome? That’s great! A few months later, Gerald died and right now he’s with the Good Shepherd. That’s great, and we praise God for that.

Here’s another one, he says, “I’m from eastern Washington. I moved to Albuquerque two years ago. I had no idea Mars Hill was out of Seattle when my friends invited me after being saved on their futon at community group on the first night four months ago.” This guy shows up to community group

in Albuquerque. The Good Shepherd sits on the futon next to him and he goes from lost to found. You know that God loves you when you get saved on a futon. Our God is willing to sit on a futon with you. I don't like to sit on a futon. Jesus is so humble he'll sit on a futon and he'll zap a guy on his first night at community group. That's pretty fantastic. He goes on to say, "God has changed my hard habits and given me an ocean of love to live in along with a strong Christian community, something I've never had." Now he's in the flock and others are looking after him.

Here's a gal, "After twenty-six years of being raised in nothing more than, 'This is good and this is bad,' religion, performing music in hundreds of churches with very hypocritical messages and completely turning my back on Jesus and the concept of God, I was gently introduced to Mars Hill by my closest friends. By the grace of God and the Holy Spirit working furiously in me through the teaching and the work of Pastor A.J. at the Albuquerque campus," I was just down there. Tons of people getting saved at the Albuquerque campus. "I was baptized on October 10, 2010. Since then I've met a godly man, got engaged. We're attending Redemption Group. I am truly amazed and incredibly blessed. About a month before my baptism a dear friend of mine, she is Japanese, was in dire straits and obviously being demonically oppressed. I invited her to church and she soon attended regularly. I preached the gospel to her as best I could as a completely new Christian as often as I could and she began to attend the Bible study at the close friend's home. My heart went out to her as her darkness was something I completely submerged myself in not so long ago. On January 23," just a few weeks ago, "she came to church with our usual group of friends and I prayed for her during the entire service. Something was different. Her body language was more attentive to the message than ever. During the response time I began to break down, praying hard for her salvation. She began to cry as well, but happily I simply looked at her asked, 'Are you ready?' She said loud and clear, 'Yes,'" which is awesome. "One of the most incredible, joyful experiences of my life was watching her get baptized." Love that.

Here's another one from Albuquerque. A guy tells a story that he was thirty-seven years old, had been abused, was absolutely depressed and suicidal. Decided he would leave his girlfriend, give his children to someone else, so he could go kill himself. And then the Good Shepherd showed up, he who was lost became found. Not only did he meet Jesus, so did his whole family and now he's in Pastor A.J.'s Bible study and he's on the Albuquerque security team serving Christ.

There's another guy here, his name is Brian. I played baseball with him growing up. He says he was a Catholic guy, he was moral and good, distanced himself from God and God's people because he says, quote, he felt he was "good enough," a good, moral person. That's what he thought. His wife Amy became a Christian and was baptized as a Christian, and she obviously longed for her husband to meet Jesus. How many of you ladies, you could say, "Yeah, that would be great if my husband met Jesus." He says, "Just a few weeks ago, I was baptized with my two children, Eva and Ben, with Amy cheering me on." That was during the narrow door sermon. How happy do you think that woman was to see her husband, their son, daughter, all go from lost to found and get baptized at the same time? God was happier than her. She was happy, he was happier.

Here's a good one. "After thirty years of praying for my Jewish parents," you know that's going to be good, "I had the amazing gift of leading both of them to Christ before they died. My father's conversion was profound. I led him to his Messiah in the hospital two weeks before he died. We sang 'Amazing Grace' together. My dad was filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus met him in very personal ways during his last weeks of life on the earth. My mom also accepted Christ earlier that same year, and on her deathbed we prayed and she called on the name of Yeshua. God is so faithful. Don't give up on praying." Can the Good Shepherd go to a hospital with somebody who has lived their whole life ignoring him and bring them from lost to found on their bed? Yes.

Here's a good one. "I am ethnically Turkish and a Muslim by background." All right? Just so you know, Turkey is where a lot Paul's trips were taken. You look at the maps in the back of your Bible, a lot of those cities where we're leading a tour to this summer, you can join us if you want, are through modern-day Turkey. It's where Christianity started. Today, I don't know what there is, 75 or 85 million people. There are only 3,000 Christians in the whole nation of Turkey. Operation World says it's the least Christian nation on earth.

This guy, "I'm Turkish Muslim." Right, you convert that guy, that's the day you go out and buy Lotto tickets. It's your day, okay? He got divorced and here's what he says. "In July 2010," so last summer, he met a guy named Donald Johns at Starbucks, who worked for Mars Hill Church. Donald sat down with him, started talking to him about Jesus. They kept meeting. Donald would bring his Bible. And here's what happened, "By August I felt strongly drawn to Jesus. I felt his love and the need to repent. Praise the Lord that he worked in my life to bring me to finally accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior on August 29, 2010. I felt a spiritual transformation and fulfillment. The emptiness was gone, replaced with joy. God's amazing grace and love filled my heart." He says, "I met Jesus and felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, realized I was being saved. I have been blessed with wonderful fellowship," there's the flock, "and have expanded my knowledge of God through his Word. Donald and I now meet every Saturday to study the Bible." Thanks, Donald. "I go to a group meeting weekly and have attended church on a regular basis, having been a believer now for a few months." I think he's at the Bellevue campus.

There's another person in here, they were worried about their eighty-seven-year-old mother. She did not love Jesus and didn't want to hear it. So this person thought, "I'm going to get my campus pastor to go talk to my mom." I think it was Pastor Bill Clem from the Ballard campus. He is our bearded charmer. Grandmothers adore him. He is a bearded charmer. He is so enjoyable. So Campus Pastor Bill Clem, the bearded charmer, goes to lunch with the eighty-seven-year-old mother and, lo and behold, she goes from lost to found, gives her life to Jesus. How happy was her daughter, her grandchildren? God was happier.

Here's one, this one starts strong. "On January 2, 2011," a couple of weeks ago, "I was shot in the head while driving on my way home from working out at the gym. Through the grace of God, I did not die and was given a second chance at life. When I woke up at Harborview and realized I was still alive, I awoke with an amazing sense of purpose and clarity. I knew without a doubt I had been given a great opportunity by God. There was an instantaneous transformation that occurred in me that day." I think he's at the Bellevue campus. "I underwent a massive reprioritization of my purposes

in life. My faith became unwavering that day. I received Christ into my life and nothing anyone can say could change what I believe. My relationship and love with Christ, family, and friends became paramount in my life. God saved my life twice, once by allowing me a second chance at life, twice by allowing me to be born again as a believer. I have been given my life by God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, amen."

I'll give you one more, this one's pretty cool. There's a ton of them. Well, here are two more. When a preacher says, "Hey, one more," you know what he means? Nothing. He just wants you to pay attention, that's all.

Here's a gal up at the Shoreline campus. She says, "I'm a volunteer teacher for the UW campus ministry and grace center," which is involved with Campus Crusade for Christ. She said, "I had the privilege to lead six Chinese students at the UW to Christ since last November. The last two students received Christ two days ago," Chinese exchange students, "on Thursday night." Isn't that great? She says, "I experience great joy when anyone receives Jesus into their heart and life and so does Jesus."

Here's one more. We could do this all day, it's great. "Jesus has been pursuing me relentlessly," she says, "for thirty years." That's a long hike. "He has surrounded me with faithful Christians who have been praying for me and witnessing to me." They were attending, she says, a Unity church, where they believe whatever. For the doctrinal statement, they hand you a blank sheet of paper and just say, "Write something down, that's fine with us." I'm not even making that up. So her husband becomes a Christian. She says, "I became an atheist after I was raped when I was sixteen. I proceeded into agnosticism in my twenties and thirties. I considered myself a quote unquote seeker, but didn't honestly consider evangelical Christianity even as an option." She says, "Oh, wasn't I so open-minded?" "When my husband read an article in the *Seattle Times* about Mars Hill, he decided that our family should attend." Quote, "I hated it. I hated the music," which I understand, "and I hated the message," which I do not understand. I have that effect on women. It's sort of a thing of mine. She says, "We attended for six years." All right? I don't do anything I don't like for six years. "We attended for six years. In the seventh year," in the seventh year! I mean, you can see Jesus saving this woman, he's like, "Come on sheep!" You know, I mean, seven years. "In the seventh year, I began to hear that still, small voice," that's the Holy Spirit, "telling me it was time for me to come to Jesus. Oh, how I resisted!" That's a stubborn sheep right there. "I wanted nothing to do with Jesus. Finally, in January 2010, I could no longer resist. The still, small voice had become too strong. I was baptized and have truly come to believe that Jesus loves me and that I am a daughter of Christ. Christ has worked some big miracles in my life. I have struggled with alcohol for many years and have tried to quit, cut back, moderate more times than I care to remember. In October," so just some months ago, "the Holy Spirit whispered to me that it was time to stop. He told me that, for me, drinking is a sin. I walked out of church that morning and told my husband what the Holy Spirit had said. The Holy Spirit has taken away my desire to drink and has made wine even taste bad. Praise the Lord, after so many years of struggling, it is not a struggle any longer. God is good." God is good. *[Applauding]*

If you're here and you're not a Christian, the Good Shepherd is looking for you. You don't need to do anything. He's carried all your sin on his back. He'll take you back to God and also he wants you to be part of this flock. We love you, we'd love to have you. For those of you who are Christians, we have this wonderful opportunity to share in God's joy by inviting people to meet Jesus.

And like we saw earlier in Luke, this includes throwing big parties. And as we see here, it's giving people an opportunity to repent so that we, along with God, can rejoice when they respond.

[End of Audio]

Note: This sermon transcript has been edited for readability.