

# Realizing and Responding

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Preacher: Dr. Daniel Heeringa

[ 0 : 00 ] Luke chapter 15. If you ever lost anything, it is frustrating and can be upsetting. It was when we lost Boo, a 16-year-old dog.

Walked out an open gate in the backyard, and he was no more. He could hardly walk across the yard, but somehow, somewhere, and with all the tears and search parties of that cold December night, we never found that dog.

One of my dearest friends, a pastor's dearest friend, owned a monument shop, and he made a headstone for my dog with his name, Boo, his dates, and a quote from Genesis 5.

He walked with God and was no more. As I prepared for this sermon, I thought when they raked the yard and the leaves off of that monument in the yard of the house that I just sold, that lady may be freaked out.

Not knowing what Boo means. It was incredible, and it was horrible, but if I would have found him, I bet it would have been a celebration like Luke chapter 15.

[ 1 : 41 ] Notice what Jesus says in Luke chapter 15, verse 4. What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that he's lost until he finds it?

And when he finds 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 found my sheep that was lost.

Just so, I tell you, there'll be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

Of course, Jesus tells that story, not about a lost dog, and not really about a lost sheep.

He tells that story about a lost soul, and how heaven celebrates when one comes to the Lord. And we ought to celebrate too.

[ 2 : 58 ] He spoke that parable because he was in the midst of a bunch of church folk that didn't like the sinners that he was hanging around.

I want you to notice the context in which he speaks. It states it in verses 1 through 3, and it says this, And the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. So he told them this parable.

So he told this parable because people were complaining about who he was ministering to. I've met folks like that before. It is disheartening.

Especially when you understand how Jesus used the term sinners here and what people mean by that. Now, some folks that they're talking about are sin-sick rebels.

[ 3 : 59 ] And some were just Gentiles. I mean, when it says tax collectors, what that means is people who were authorized by the government to collect taxes. And if their responsibility was to recover \$100 worth of taxes, they could put a fee on that, a collection fee on that, with the authority of the Roman Empire behind them.

And knowing that the Roman Empire's authority was behind them, they could do just about anything they wanted to. They were thieves, you know. It's kind of like the IRA. No, no, no, anyway. But. And then some of them are just sin-sick. And some of them are Gentiles.

People that Jesus should not have eaten with because he was a good Jew. And Gentiles were unclean. Some people will tell you who you ought to eat with today.

They'll tell you who we ought to minister to today. It's not wrong to call these people sinners, but you need to understand, don't separate yourselves out as saints because a proud saint is a dirty sinner too.

[ 5 : 12 ] And the only thing that separates the sinner from the saint is the grace of God. That's it. And that's who Jesus is addressing. So if you're going to celebrate the lost being found, you have to spend time with the lost and be a part of that process, that finding.

Because we are here to help them be found. The fields are wide under harvest. I preached last week on compel them to come. He calls us to be a part of that process.

And the Pharisees and the scribes love this story because there's rejoicing over the lost. They just did not like the thought of looking for the lost. Playing a part in that process.

And I do believe Jesus was getting a dig in when he followed that story with verse 7. It says, just so I tell you, there'll be more joy. Excuse me. He ends that story with verse 7. Just so I tell you, there'll be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous people who need no repentance.

Who doesn't need repentance? But there's a lot of people that think they don't. He don't stop there though.

[ 6 : 31 ] You have to admire Christ for a lot of reasons. And one of them is, when it gets a little uneasy, he just digs a little deeper. He continues.

He says, 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's found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors saying, rejoice with me.

For I found the coin that I lost. Just so I tell you, there's joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Last year, the church in which I was serving, we had a fall festival.

And at that fall festival, Millie lost a hoop earring. And it was apparently a good one. Guys, if you didn't know, I found out that day, there are apparently a lot of different qualities of earrings.

Even the ones that, you know, don't have diamonds and stuff. I mean, just pieces of metal. But there's some that are precious. And it made her nervous to tell her mother that she had lost the hoop earring.

[ 7 : 45 ] So the first question I asked her was one of the most helpful questions people always ask when you lose something. Have you retraced your steps? And then I said, well, where have you been?

And she said, and I'll retrace them. And, of course, it's a fall festival. She's been all over the building, you know. She's been in all the rooms of the building. She's been in the gymnasium. She's been through all that.

We're at a fall festival. She's been everywhere. And we're looking for it. And so I'm walking around the gym with my head down, looking around.

And somebody comes by and says, Pastor, get your head up, you know. And I said, no, you get your head down. I'm looking for an earring, you know. We looked and looked and looked. And when the gym had basically been cleaned up, we jointly confessed to her mother.

Who reminded us, those are good hoops. By the way, they were on a dresser at the house. She never put one of them in.

[ 8 : 57 ] Story of my life. I bet that this dear lady in Luke chapter 15 would have had similar thoughts. When she apparently had lost a tenth of the money she had.

She looked intensely. Especially if it was a special coin. And some believe it was. Some scholars believe that Jesus was speaking of these kind of coins.

Which in that tradition was silver coins linked together by a silver chain to make a headdress to show that the woman was married. That was the wedding ring of the day.

She searched like she lost her wedding ring. To find such a thing would be so relieving. What a blessing. He compared that to heaven rejoicing when the lost are saved.

And then he got much more specific. He's not talking about a sheep. He's not talking about a coin. He's talking about when people get right.

[ 10 : 13 ] And then he shares. The most famous parable. That he ever shared. And he said this. There was a man.

Who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father. Father give me the share of property that's coming to me. And he divided his property between them. And not many days later the younger son gathered all that he had and took a journey into a far country.

And there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything. A severe famine arose in that country.

And he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country. Who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate.

And no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself. He said how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread.

[11:18] But I perish here with hunger. I will arise and go to my father. And I'll say to him father.

I've sinned against heaven. And before you I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. And he arose and he came to his father. But while he was still a long way off. His father saw him.

He felt compassion. And ran. And embraced him. And kissed him. And the son said to him. Father I have sinned against heaven. And before you I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

But the father said to his servants. Bring quickly the best robe. Put it on him. Put a ring on his hand. Shoes on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it. And let us eat and celebrate.

For this my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. It is a message to each and every one of us.

[12:18] Friend it is time. To come home. All of us have sinned. All of us have wandered away. What is wrong in our lives need to be made right.

And if we haven't made it right. It's time to make it right. So the question is. How do you come home to the father? Well what do I mean by that? Well.

The first step is we realize what we've done. The scandal of this young man was absolutely horrible. He lived in a culture that to ask his dad for his inheritance before his dad died.

And before he cared for his dad in his elderly years. And cared for that estate. Was to wish his father as good as dead. It was wrong for what he did. It is shocking still today.

In that culture for such a request. Even more shocking is what his dad did. If my kids came to me and said. Dad give me what I got coming to me.

[13:21] I would. I'd give him what he had coming to him. That's not what he did. Even more shocking was. That he had squandered.

Not only the interest of the estate. That his dad had partially inherited. And partially grown for himself. But he squandered the principle too. And it wasn't in a bad business deal.

It wasn't just due to a downed economy. It was in drinking and carousing. And running with women that do. I mean that's what he was doing. And I hear of those that win millions in the lottery.

And blow it all in a couple of years. With nothing but debt and taxes left. If you win the lottery. And you don't want to lose it all. Come see me.

Okay. I will help you out. But even worse. To take the family estate. And burn it up partying. I mean.

[14:19] What do you think good church people think. When they listen to Jesus story. About somebody who'd do something like that. Probably similar to what we're thinking.

And it gets worse. Because while he was doing that. The economy went bust. Gas went to four dollars. Groceries went high. And the government wasn't even helping out.

But may I not digress. He had to find work. When there was little work to do. And so he went and fed the swine. The worst job a Jew could ever have.

Feeding unclean animals. The most unclean. I remember when I was in college. Transferred from Greenville Tech.

To Gardner Webb. And entered their religious studies program. And God engaged me with a couple of men. That gave me opportunities to preach. Throughout North Carolina.

[15:18] As a 20, 21 year old kid. First sermon I ever preached. Was on Luke 15. About coming home. I was preaching out of the King James Version.

And that phrase. I didn't even know what it meant. But I loved it. And I've loved it ever since. He feigned to fill his belly. With the husk that the swine did eat. That feigned me.

He was dying for it. I mean you know. It's like when you're at the fair. And somebody eats a funnel cake next to you. You know. You feigned to fill your belly. With the funnel cake that they did eat.

You know. I mean that's what.

But it was the. It was the. It was pig slop. And while he's sitting there in the mud.

Envious. Of the hogs. Something clicked. I thank God for the Holy Spirit click.

[16:26] When something within us. And it's not of us. Thank God. Says what in the world are you doing? What in the world are you doing? What in the world are you doing? He not only realized

what he had done.

He realized where he was. And we have to too. When we are in sin. And the second step to coming to the father is. We realize where we are. It's not only realizing what we've done. It's realize where we are.

I'm wanting to eat after the pigs. The servant in my father's house are better than this. And I'm going to repent. Which means I'm going to turn around. And there's a good.

That's a good place to be. To know the change needs to come. That happens a lot on Sunday morning. People come to the point. Where some of you are right now.

Where you know that there needs to be a change in your life. Something is eating at you. And you know that you need to make a change in your life.

[ 17 : 26 ] It happens a lot on Sunday morning. I hear about it later. But there's one more crucial step. It's not just realizing what we've done.

It's not just realizing where we are. It is that we got to get up. And make it right. We've got to move. You've got to move on it. You've got to repent. You've got to change the direction of your life. And follow the Lord. And if there's something in you. That is twitching you.

That is showing you. That something's wrong. I will tell you. You didn't come up with that on your own. That is nothing but the Holy Spirit of God. Moving and working in your life.

And you have a responsibility. To respond to that. It's good to know that you need to do something. But that is not enough. And when he came.

[ 18 : 25 ] The father ran to meet him. That's unheard of. That an older man would run to receive anybody. Let alone a son that had burned up much of his estate.

Yet that's what the dad did. He met him where he was. And he robed him. That's the honor. He gave him a ring of authority. You know what that means? A signet ring is a power of attorney. The shoes. Man he wasn't a servant. He was a son. To a slave. A shoe is a sign of freedom. It was then. Probably was 160 years ago in America.

And then they pulled out the fattened calf. You know what that is? That's prime rib. That's a tomahawk rib. I mean a tomahawk steak. Rib eye. That's the best. He's celebrating the rebirth of his son. He says he was dead. And is alive again. He's lost. And is found. Like a lost sheep that's now found. Like a precious jewel or a valuable coin now found.

[ 19 : 28 ] A lost soul who has repented and changed makes heaven joyful. Leads heaven to cheer. Leads the father to throw a party.

People often wonder what in the world are those that I love that have went on to glory. What do they know about what's going on on the earth? And what do they understand?

Or what do they see? And I don't have all those answers. In 2023 I plan to preach a series of sermons on heaven and hell called the reality of eternity. And we'll talk about some of that. I'll tell you what scripture says though.

Scripture says when somebody gets saved, heaven rejoices. They're throwing a party. They're rejoicing. However, not everybody acts like that when somebody comes.

Verse 25 says, now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

[ 20 : 38 ] And he called one of his servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, your brother's come. And your father just killed a fattened calf. Because he's received him back here safe and sound.

But that older brother was angry. And he refused to go in. His father came out and treated him. But he answered his father, look. These many years I've served you and I've never disobeyed your command.

That you never gave me a young goat that I may celebrate my friends. But when this son of yours came.

Who's devoured your property with prostitutes. You killed a fattened calf for him. And he said to him, son. You are always with me.

And all that is mine is yours. Literally. It's fitting to celebrate and be glad for this. Your brother was dead. And is alive.

[ 21 : 45 ] He's lost. And is found. I want to tell you something this morning. The Holy Spirit of God is speaking to your heart and life about getting a matter straight in your life.

That you haven't got straight. You need to respond to him in obedience. And when you get it right. Don't expect everybody to be happy about it. Because everybody won't be. To make a decision for Christ that leads you to stop doing it your way. And start doing it his way. Is to make a decision that everyone is not going to like. Now I'm not talking about a hokey pokey decision. You know. One foot in. One foot out. Not knowing what to do. I'm talking about all in. I'm talking about completely. When you do that. Everyone will not applaud. Some will be angry at the attention you got. You know what that boy's been doing? I mean here I am.

[ 22 : 51 ] I've been faithful this whole time. Ain't nobody celebrating me. I'm the one towing the line. Ain't nobody celebrating me. But this old boy squandered years. And yet he comes back.

Some folks are so full of self. That they fail to see the hand of God changing lives. They just want to bring up the past.

You know who else wants to bring up the past? The evil one himself. And thankfully the father. The evil one. With just as much compassion. Invites. This other prodigal.

To the celebration. I am thankful today. That God does not get exhausted. With the recklessly lost. Nor the piously proud. He loves us all.

And he calls us all to come home. So if you're a believer today. And are doing nothing to reach the world. Maybe even self-righteously jealous of God doing a new thing in someone else.

[ 24 : 00 ] Realize where you are. Realize what you've done. And get up and make it right. And if you've never surrendered your life to Christ.

And you've been too busy for the world and for yourself. Repent. Turn to Christ. And obey him today. And I will tell you all of heaven will celebrate the change in your life.

And I'll tell you the folks that love Jesus and are right with Jesus. At Pickens First Baptist Church. Will celebrate with you. That you've made a change in your life.

But if you're a Christian this morning. But living like you're lost. Living like one that's not been changed by the blood of the Lamb. Living by one who's not pouring it out.

To the one who poured it out. If you're living like the lost world half the time. It's time to repent. It's time to change. It's time to turn your life around.

[ 25 : 03 ] By realizing what you've done. Realizing where you are. And to get up. And make it right. It has been my prayer this week.

God help us to see. What we've done. God help us to see. Each individual.

Where we are. But seeing what we've done. And seeing what we where we are. Is not enough. You got to do something about it. And as long as we're reluctant. To publicly be obedient to the Lord. We're not going to be obedient to the Lord.

So I'm telling you as God speaks today. Get up. Trust him. He's good for it. I promise you. And he'll receive you with open arms.

[ 26 : 10 ] And so will I. With every head bowed. Every eye closed. I don't know what's going on. In your lives. I'm getting to know some more.

But I don't know. I'm new. We ain't walked through enough valleys together. But the reality is. God knows.

He knows what you need to do. My greatest burden today. Is if you're here today. And there's never been a time in your life. When you concretely have made a decision. To follow Christ as your Lord and Savior.

I want you to know that today. Is the day of salvation. He'll save you today. And the whole sense that you get. That you need salvation. That you need a change.

Didn't come from you. You couldn't have developed that. That came from God. God's working and moving. In your heart and life right now. And he expects you to respond in obedience. And so you do that.

[ 27 : 06 ] But even more today. There are those in this room. Who are Christians. You've made a decision for Christ. You follow the Lord. But you ain't following them close. And you might have. Got real distant.

Even went to a distant country. Even been eating in the wrong places. With the wrong people.

Doing the wrong thing. And today you need to say. Lord. I'm coming home.

I'm coming home. I want it right. I want to sit at your table. And make it right. I want to get it right.

God's maybe leading you. To make a private decision.

For the Lord public. Through baptism. God may be leading you. To be a part of this church. One imperfect person. Joining up with other imperfect people.

Joining in the journey together. Father. Man let's stamp it out. For the Lord Jesus Christ. We welcome you to come. Heavenly Father. I don't know what you're doing.

[ 28 : 01 ] In people's hearts and lives. But I'm thankful for the sweet spirit. That I've sensed is moving in this place. Help us to simply be obedient. As you lead us. Father I pray. Give us a boldness.

That is beyond us. Give us an insight. And an understanding. That we couldn't come up with. Just on our own dear God. Give us a fortitude.

That we'll not back up. From doing everything. You'd have us to do. In Jesus precious name. Amen.