

Walking with Jesus in Celebration

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[0 : 00] Luke 15 verses 1 through 10. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus.

But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. Then Jesus told them this parable.

Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home.

Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me. I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who do not need to repent.

Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, Rejoice with me.

[1 : 09] I have found my lost coin. In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. Amen.

So we are going to go back now and hear what God is saying through his word in Luke chapter 15, which Elijah read for us earlier on.

thinking about how through lockdown, pandemic, you know, our lives have been really disrupted and the way we normally do things we can't do anymore.

And so that then does provide an opportunity to reframe how we live our lives and to form new habits.

So that's really what I want to think about with you this morning. It's just the kind of habits we've got and especially a habit of celebration. So how can we let joy, celebration, thanksgiving be part of our lives in the day to day?

[2 : 15] So here we are, spiritual habits, walking with Jesus in celebration. I'm just going to lean forward for one second and turn down my monitor.

So, sorry about that. So parties, I love a good party. Here's, I don't know if you can see that very clearly or not.

It's a wedding party. A bagpiper and the bride and groom and everybody's up and clapping and cheering. Or here's a friend at Cornerstone's, Lolita Jackson singing in a club in Edinburgh, singing jazz with her band, celebrating the gift of music.

Or here's an old family friend celebrating his first birthday, not one of my offspring. Or another child celebrating their birthday.

And here, don't look at that cake too closely, but that's me selling my birthday lots of years ago. So parties are a big part of life, aren't they?

[3 : 26] We like to celebrate with friends and family. And some of the most memorable moments of our lives are celebrations. Friends of Louise and I celebrated their 31st wedding anniversary this week past.

And I still remember that wedding night 31 years ago, that wedding celebration 31 years ago. So clearly. Lots of our best friends were there.

It was in a nice hotel in the middle of nowhere. It was a great meal, great speeches, very funny, and an evening of dancing and music and fun and laughter.

And I've never forgotten that great night, a night of real happiness. So celebration, happiness, community, sharing the joy of life together, those are really important things.

And when we read Luke 15, what we saw is that celebration is not just something that we do. It's something that God does. It's something that happens in the presence of God in heaven.

[4 : 40] So in Luke chapter 15, that's what we read. In the same way, there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent.

And then again, in verse 10, it says, in the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents. So right now in heaven, there is a lot of rejoicing going on.

And because heaven rejoices over Jesus and the salvation that he gives, then we want to rejoice too over Jesus and the salvation that he gives.

Through these two stories that are told by Jesus here in Luke 15, he's reminding us that the real story of our world is not a story of unmitigated and unending disaster and pessimism and hopelessness, nor is it the story of our earnest search for truth or God, but rather the real story of this world is of God's search for us.

We celebrate today a God who loves us so much that he leaves us home in heaven and spares himself absolutely nothing in order to find us and then take us home with him.

[6 : 10] In the new creation, in the presence of God, we will celebrate forever. There is rejoicing in heaven. So, I always want to just leave you with something to hang on to through the week as you think back from Thursday or whenever and think, what was church about on Sunday morning?

What did we think about? This is the idea that we celebrate today what we will celebrate for eternity. We celebrate today what we will celebrate for eternity.

And what we're celebrating is this, that Jesus welcomes sinners. That's what Luke tells us or Jesus, Luke tells us here in chapter 15, verses 1 and 2, tax collectors who were real outsiders, people looked down on because they worked for the Romans and gathered more money than they were entitled to from the ordinary Jewish populace.

sinners, you know, the kind of really notorious Luke down on disreputable people, were all gathering around to hear Jesus and the more religious, more devout people were really scandalized by this.

They're muttering away, look at this man, look at Jesus. He welcomes sinners and eats with them. So, that's our first point of celebration is that Jesus welcomes sinners.

[7 : 34] that's the whole point of our celebration is that we have a God in Jesus Christ who welcomes sinners. Now, I get it that life is not a fuzzy peach, is it?

We're not inviting you or others to follow Jesus because the Christian life is a fun-filled adventure full of some kind of endless spiritual buzz.

our circumstances, our day-to-day lives reflect the reality of the terrible twins of suffering and sin and that's every day.

Every day there is suffering, every day there is sin and some days are just hard, difficult, sad, broken days when life really feels like it's on a minor note.

But even though there are days which are really dark and difficult, we want to say that again, you know, that that minor note gives rise to something else, to a repeating theme, a repeating phrase of music that is profound, moving, joyful, joyful, hopeful, stirring, powerful and life-giving.

[8 : 58] And that's Jesus. He is the one who moves our hearts, who renews our hope, who stirs us and gives newness of life in powerful and transformative ways.

So although some days are just difficult, the predominant theme of the Christian life is joy, celebration and thanksgiving.

There is rejoicing in heaven. We're told that three times in this chapter actually. There's not just two stories, we didn't read the third story which is about a father welcoming back his prodigal son.

But there are three stories in this chapter that are three-fold repetition for emphasis of the joy, the rejoicing, the celebration of heaven.

And heaven is celebrating God's saving grace. The story of the shepherd seeking the lost sheep or the woman looking for her lost coin, those are stories of grace, of seeking and finding.

[10 : 05] Jesus is using them to teach us about a loving God who comes to seek and save those who are lost, of a God who doesn't sit passively back in heaven, detached and remote, but God who takes the initiative and comes for us.

Even if we don't want anything to do with him, he comes to look for us. He is like the shepherd or the woman. We might hate him, we might stray from him, we might hide from him, but Jesus comes to find us and bring us home.

That's the amazing story of grace and love that heaven celebrates. That Jesus doesn't spare himself until he has made full atonement for our sin through his death on the cross.

Through suffering, rejection and crucifixion, Jesus shows his great pursuing love. And it's that great story that lays the foundation for celebration and joy and rejoicing in heaven every day.

all day, every day, as sinner after sinner, thousands upon thousands come to faith in Jesus, heaven rejoices.

[11 : 24] We're given a picture of heaven towards the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation. An amazing vision that was given to the Apostle John of what heaven looks like.

And, you know, a lot of it is allegory but, and metaphor and drawing in Old Testament pictures and images. And in Revelation chapter 5, there's just a great crescendo of worship.

And that, that worship culminates in these words. As the, all of heaven and earth joins in the same anthem of praise, what is it that they celebrate?

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, that is Jesus Christ. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise.

That's what's going on in heaven today and it's what's going to be going on in heaven forever. And you know what Jesus taught us to pray? He taught us to pray, may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[12 : 34] And if it is God's will that we celebrate the salvation of Jesus in heaven, then it is also God's will that we celebrate the salvation of Jesus on earth.

We celebrate on earth as it is in heaven. We worship Jesus and rejoice in him today here in our living rooms or sitting in your bed or walking outside listening to this on your phone perhaps, whatever you're doing, we worship God wherever we are today as he is worshipped in heaven because we rejoice and celebrate the great truth that heaven rejoices and celebrates that God comes to seek and save the lost.

That's my joy as a human being. You know, my life has its complications, its difficulties, its sorrows and frustrations but there is a wave of joy that just keeps rippling through my life.

One blessing, one good thing after another and it's all rooted in this that all is not lost for me or for this world because Jesus saves, because God has a better story for me and for this world and for you because many people are still being rescued, people's lives are being turned around and restored by the power of the gospel.

Every day as a believer I celebrate my salvation. God came to me a hopeless, broken, rebellious, lost sinner and he rescued me.

[14 : 18] Not because I did anything but out of the sheer goodness of his love. That fills me. I mean, it's been part of my life for so long but every day when I really think about it, it thrills me that God would love me in this way.

Every day I celebrate my many brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ that I get to have Christian friendship and community with because they too know what new life is.

They know what eternal life is. They know what forgiveness is. They know what hope is. Even if you're not a Christian this morning, I would say please rejoice. Find hope in what Jesus is doing in this world.

The difference that he's making to so many people's lives. The way that he rescues broken people. The way that he causes his people to be generous. To give away their money, their time and their gifts to love and serve others.

So when we celebrate Jesus, we're not saying life is simple or easy but we're celebrating a better story. We're celebrating Jesus. We're celebrating his salvation.

[15 : 34] And as we celebrate life in Jesus, we're getting ready for heaven. We're aligning our lives in this world of shadows with life in the world to come with the greater reality that awaits us with the full light of day.

and it's a great way to live, to live in anticipation of this greater joy and happiness. It's a great way to live, to have the joy of the Lord as your strength, to rejoice each day in the Lord, the life that you have in him.

That's a joy that is consistent and doesn't depend on your circumstances, how well things are going because it depends on Jesus.

our circumstances often change, sometimes for the worse, but Jesus never changes. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. And he always loves us and his salvation is sure for now and for eternity.

That's why we celebrate. We celebrate because Jesus welcomes sinners like us. I've got to think secondly a bit more then about how we celebrate and I've got a really simple idea here.

[16 : 51] We celebrate with others around food and drink. So, the Pharisees, the angry people in the story, the miserable people in the story, they are muttering about Jesus because he welcomes sinners and eats with them.

That's how he shows his welcome. That's how he celebrates with people. He eats with them. So, not so easy in a time of COVID perhaps to celebrate with others but we have to think creatively, put on your creative brains and think about ways you can still celebrate with others.

What's a real party like? Well, I spoke about parties at the beginning. There are some birthdays that go past when maybe all you get is a text from somebody saying happy birthday or maybe not even that.

Birthdays that go past where you don't get any presents from anyone. Everybody seems to have forgotten. Or there are birthdays when everybody seems to be in touch saying happy birthday, giving you a gift, family and friends gather around, there's food and drink.

And, you know, that's what Jesus loved to do is to gather people to enjoy each other and to enjoy him together. and to enjoy the life, the hope, the better story that he was bringing to them.

[18 : 19] So Jesus had really good parties, okay? They weren't sort of dull, lifeless, boring, polite. They scandalized people in his very conservative culture because Jesus loved to eat and drink and celebrate with people at weddings, at dinners, at parties.

Jesus was there and his people will still celebrate. We want to subvert the despair of this world. We want to subvert the fragmentation of our society by celebrating like Jesus, by bringing together all kinds of different people into a community that celebrates and rejoices because there is hope in Jesus Christ.

Some of you will know that one of the things that we make a value of Cornerstone is that we are a celebratory community. We believe that it's worth celebrating what God is doing in our lives and in this world and that that makes us a really distinctive community.

And we believe that we have more to celebrate than anyone else because we have Jesus. And this is how Jesus describes the coming of his kingdom.

The kingdom is a feast that's described to us in the previous chapter of this gospel, chapter 14 of Luke's gospel. So Jesus, by celebrating, by feasting, challenged and changed people's perceptions of the kingdom.

[20 : 04] And when we celebrate together, we too challenge and change people's perceptions of the kingdom of God. If people think that Christianity in Scotland is dreary, miserable, lifeless, guilt-ridden, you know, misery, then that's our fault.

We need to show them the joy, the hope, the life, the celebration of the gospel. So Jesus celebrated with others and both the people in this story, you know, they both invite others to their celebration.

So the shepherd goes out, he can't find this one sheep out of 99 that's gone astray until he searches and he searches until he finds it. And when he finds it, he's just delighted to get this sheep back because it's precious to him, it matters.

So he sticks it on his shoulders and he goes home. And then what does he do? Well, he calls around all his friends, he messages everybody, gets in touch and he says, party at my place, rejoice with me, I have found my lost sheep.

And it's the same with the woman, she's lost this really valuable amount of money for her, a silver coin, 10% of her wealth or her financial security.

[21 : 29] So she goes out and she searches and she sweeps the house until she at last finds it. And when she does, she texts every day, WhatsApps her friends and says, come on, party at my place, rejoice with me, I have found my lost coin.

So we know God is up to something good in this world. And we say, rejoice with me because God is finding lost people. Party at my place because God is rescuing, redeeming and restoring.

So the overflowing grace and joy of God flows into us and through us making the church an eyebrow raising community of celebration and grace.

Because Jesus' parties were like no others. you know, there were people there that shouldn't have been there. Jesus says in Luke chapter 14, the previous chapter, when you give a luncheon or a dinner, don't invite your friends, your brothers or relatives or your rich neighbors.

If you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

[22 : 55] Jesus' parties were not just for the insiders, for the popular or the respectable. They were for the outsiders, for the marginalized, for the refugees, the immigrants, for the people who were looked down on and excluded most of the time.

So the kind of people that we invite into our celebrations should raise eyebrows. People should be like, what are they doing here? That's the kind of way that we want to do it.

So throw a party, invite the uninvited. That's the story of grace. The outsider becomes the insider. The orphan becomes a son or a daughter. The lonely are set in families.

The stained and broken are washed and made clean. The prisoners and the slaves are set free. The guilty are forgiven. The shamed are restored.

This is a great subversive act. In a world that treats everyone on merit and a world that relates to people around what advantage is there for me in this, this is just generosity and it's a subversive act.

[24 : 11] Celebrations that embrace people of different classes, ethnicities, backgrounds and languages. Do you know what the most diverse community in the world is? The Church of Jesus Christ.

I'm reading this book it's now called Confronting Christianity. Twelve hard truths that people ask or twelve hard questions that people ask about Christianity. And one of the chapters, chapter two, is about doesn't religion or doesn't Christianity crush diversity?

Doesn't Christianity crush diversity? and well worth reading this book and reading that chapter to show the incredible diversity there is of the Christian church right across the world in Africa, Asia, Latin America.

So the church is an incredibly diverse community and that's what we want to show that Jesus brings together the least likely and puts them in families together.

Now you can't really do that right now can you? You can't open your home and invite a bunch of people around for a party so do be creative.

[25 : 22] Have a Zoom party if you can. We need to pray every day for fresh Zoom energy don't we? Because who wouldn't love at this point not to have another Zoom meeting for six months?

So pray every day for Zoom strength. Have a Zoom party. call people. Cook a meal. Drop it off at somebody's front door and then go back and eat with them virtually.

Or you know what's a great way of celebrating and blessing others? Sending gifts. Sending food or a present or flowers or wine or whatever it might be.

But be generous. Open your heart. Show that you're rejoicing in the Lord. Tell that better story that everything matters. One of the things we love to do as a church family is to say let's celebrate the small things of life because God is redeeming and restoring all things.

There's meaning even to the smallest goodnesses of life. Small things are there to be celebrated and enjoyed as part of the big story of what God is rejoicing and redeeming.

[26 : 31] Small things are pointers of hope. Birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, new jobs, new children, new homes. We rejoice with those who rejoice. So build habits of joy.

Okay, Christianity, you know, the kind of Christianity we don't want is sort of painted on, fake smile, cheesy grin. This is not a superficial thing that we want to draw people towards or enter into for ourselves or point others to.

We want habits that bring joy to the heart of who we are because the terrible twins of suffering and sin will turn up at your door every single day and knock really hard.

Knock really hard with stories of misery and grief and fear and anger. And to counter that, to counter the terrible twins of suffering and sin, we need to make sure that we have really strong daily habits of gratitude, worship, and celebration.

Because otherwise, the terrible twins of suffering and sin will make sure that our gravity in life is downwards that we'll keep getting pulled into the darkness. So we need habits that pull us in the other direction, towards the light, towards the joy, towards celebration.

[27 : 59] So every day, thank God because of his goodness. Thank God for his salvation story for you and others. Every Sunday as Christians, we don't just turn up on Zoom or YouTube or wherever for church or even in person.

We turn up because we are celebrating the Lord's Day, the day that belongs to Jesus because he rose on the third day. We celebrate resurrection life. Every church service is not just going through a process of songs and prayers and readings and talks.

We are celebrating the gospel. There is good news for this world. Every week, we get to celebrate friendship and community with city groups. Every day, every week, we can send gifts, share what we have and be a blessing to others.

So please enjoy God. He is so much better than we tend to give Him credit for. Look at the grandeur and wonder of what He has done.

He is so much better than you tend to give Him credit for. He is the one who initiates, achieves, applies and completes our salvation. All we have is from Him from beginning to end.

[29 : 19] He welcomes sinners, not good people, not changed people. He is not welcoming the sorted. He welcomes sinners. That means He welcomes real people, bad, broken, flawed, failed people.

Jesus welcomes the real you, not the edited version of you. Jesus welcomes the real you, not the social media presentation of you, not your Instagram profile or your Facebook page, not the polished you.

Do you know what? The worst of you does not put Jesus off. The bits of you that you cringe at, that make you want to vomit when you think about them or hurt yourself or harm yourself or hide yourself behind some carefully curated exterior, the person behind that carefully curated exterior, the fearful, shameful, sad, lonely you.

Jesus welcomes that version of you, that person. His arms are open. His embrace is there. That true hidden version of you, he welcomes.

He holds you. He will heal you in the loving power of his grace. He will hold you in his loving arms and he will rejoice over you as well as you repent and are saved.

[30 : 57] So what an amazing God. Enjoy him, celebrate, rejoice. Christ. Remember this. We often think religion is a quest to find God and it doesn't matter what path we take.

As long as we're sincere and seek after truth, then we will reach there in the end. But that's not what this says. It says, actually, it's not your sincere seeking after God that matters.

It's God's loving, passionate, seeking after you. Salvation is not something you obtain by your seeking but that God gives through his son, Jesus Christ.

That is a better story. God has done everything you need to be saved. So, Jesus says this, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. That is challenging but it's amazing. We come to the Father through Jesus. We can come. There's a story, in the story too, is just this little idea of repentance.

[32 : 05] There is rejoicing over, in heaven, over one sinner who repents. Rather, 99 righteous people who don't need to repent. Now, that's an irony. Everybody needs to repent.

Jesus has been ironic about the 99 righteous or self-righteous who think they don't need to repent. Everyone needs to repent. To confess where they've got it wrong and gone wrong and to turn back to Jesus who is the way, the truth, and the life.

And that's how we enjoy God. That's how we find God. That's how we know what it is to celebrate salvation for ourselves and for others.

So, let me finish with a short prayer. Lord, we ask for your grace, power, and mercy to be at work in each of us today. We pray that we would find that joy that there is in Jesus Christ for ourselves and that we would share it with many others.

Amen. we win