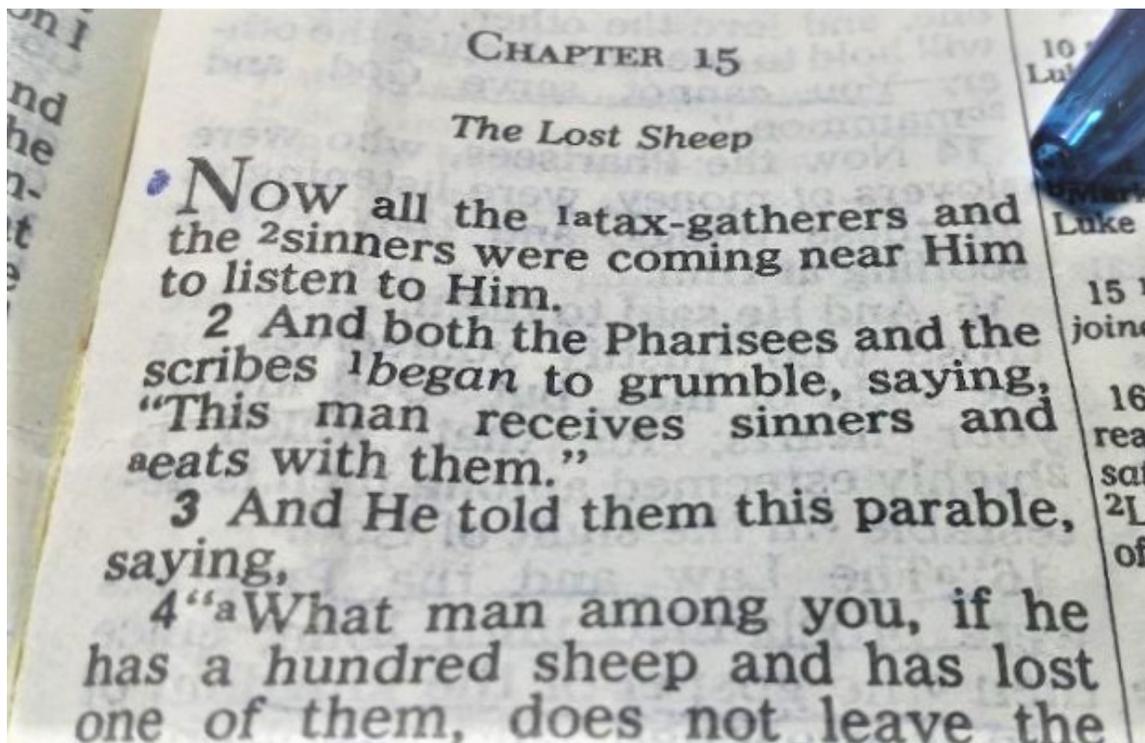


“Jesus Receives Sinners – Then and Now”

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This Man Receives Sinners - Luke 15:2 - Photo by Whitney V. Myers

"Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them'" (Luke 15:1-2)

Jesus receives people outside the faith community, treats them with tenderness, and calls them to repentance and faith in God who loves them.

First, some definitions. Who were these people in Luke 15:1-2?

Tax Collectors. Tax collectors were people who collected various taxes for the Romans who occupied Palestine. They often charged much more than they should to make themselves rich (Ref. 1). The Jewish people despised the tax collectors and considered any Jew a traitor who was a tax

collector for the Romans. Jesus called Matthew (Levi), a tax collector, to be his disciple (Matthew 9:9, Mark 2:14, Luke 5:27-28).

Sinners. The synoptic gospel writers often lumped together "tax collectors" and "sinners" (Matthew 9:10-11, Mark 2:15-16, Luke 5:30, Luke 15:1). The Pharisees shunned both tax collectors and people that the Pharisees deemed "sinners," including:

- 1) *People who lived blatantly in contradiction to the law* - such as murderers, robbers, and prostitutes (Luke 7:37, Matthew 21:31, Ref. 2 below).
- 2) *"The people of the land" (am ha-aretz) who did not observe the Pharisees' strict interpretation of the law* (Matthew 23:1-5, Ref. 3). This category included almost everybody, so many "sinners" were in the daily company of Jesus (Matthew 11:18-19, Mark 2:15, Luke 15:1, Ref. 2, Ref. 3).

Pharisees. The Pharisees were a Jewish religious sect. "Pharisee" is derived from the Aramaic term, *peras* ("to divide and separate"). Hence, a Pharisee was someone "*separated from sin*" (Ref. 4). The Pharisees separated themselves from the great mass of the populace—the "people of the land" (*am ha-aretz*)—by their "strict adherence to the minutia of their legal tradition" (Ref. 5).

The Pharisees believed the deception that they earned merit before God based on religious works (Luke 18:10-13, Ref. 5). In contrast, true believers in Christ recognize "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The Pharisees appeared in the gospels as the chief antagonists of Jesus (Matthew 19:3, Matthew 22:15, Mark 8:11-12, Ref. 5).

The Pharisees largely were members of the middle class—businessmen, merchants, and tradesmen of their day (Ref. 5). In legal matters, the Pharisees had recourse to the professionals in the law, the scribes (described below).

Scribes. The scribes were educated teachers and authorities in the Mosaic law (Ref. 6). In Jesus' day, the scribes were legal professionals who drafted documents such as contracts for marriage, loans, or sale of land (Ref.

7). The scribes questioned Jesus' authority, "By what authority are you doing these things, or who gave you this authority to do them?" (Mark 11:28). The scribes participated with the Pharisees in criticizing Jesus and his disciples (Mark 7:5-8). Jesus pronounced multiple woes against the practices of the scribes and Pharisees (interesting reading, Matthew 23:13-36).

What are the main principles in Luke 15:1-2?

God Draws Sinners to Jesus. Luke 15:1 is remarkable because not only does Jesus seek people who are lost (Luke 19:10), but also that *God draws people who are sinners to seek Jesus*. Luke, the gospel writer, says, "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him" (Luke 15:1).

At the time of the event that Luke describes in Luke 15:1-2, Jesus was in the last months of his earthly ministry (Ref. 8 below). Many people whom the Pharisees shunned as sinners recognized their need for Jesus and came to him. These were people through home and family associations or through their occupations or immoral living were looked upon with disfavor by the Pharisees and scribes. Often they were indifferent or had little to do with their more religious and orthodox countrymen. "The religious people, Pharisees in heart, despised them and looked on them as hopelessly lost" (Ref. 9).

No one spoke to these people like Jesus. To these people who were "outside of the synagogues" of their time Jesus brought hope. Jesus spoke to them with tenderness. Sinners came to Jesus as their Great Physician to find healing for their spiritual, emotional, and physical ailments. Jesus did not overlook their sin, but called these people to repentance (Luke 5:29-32, Mark 1:14-15).

Jesus Receives Sinners - Then and Now. Luke 15:2 tells us, "And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'" The Pharisees, the religious establishment of Jesus' day, were indignant that Jesus associated with people outside the synagogue community who did not keep the rules the Pharisees believed necessary for merit with God. In contrast, Jesus deliberately showed people the true

nature of God. He reached out in kindness to people outside the religious establishment. He treated them with tenderness, and he called them to repentance and faith in God who loves them. Jesus does the same today.

The Pharisees accused Jesus of receiving sinners. That was (and is) a true accusation. Jesus does receive sinners - then and now. The Greek work for *receive* means *actively look for, expectantly wait, and warmly receive* (Ref. 10). Jesus is like the excellent example of the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). The father expectantly waited for his son to return to him. When the prodigal son returned, the son repented of his sin, and the father received him with great joy.

Jesus expectantly waits to receive you.

Apply. Come to Jesus. He will warmly receive you. Come to Jesus. He will heal you of your spiritual, emotional, and physical sickness. Jesus will forgive your sin and will cleanse you from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

References

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