

English Bible Study Luke 15: 1-7

Introduction

When we read Jesus parables, we must always remember why Jesus told them. In this case he was talking to tax collectors and “sinners”. But they were not really the ones he wanted to hear this story. The Pharisees and collectors of the law were listening and muttering about Jesus, because he made friends with sinners and ate with them. The Pharisees thought they would be “contaminated” by people who were “sinners”. This implies of course that the teachers etc were pure and were *not* sinners. Pride is very evident here. Of course, there is no virtue in being a “sinner”. In this parable, Jesus deliberately compares sinners to sheep. We think of sheep as cute and cuddly. However, sheep stray easily and are very stubborn. In New Zealand “sheep trials” demonstrate the ability of dogs to herd stubborn sheep in a pen. Sheep are not clever animals and simply follow each other blindly. Jesus knew that they were not necessarily pleasant animals. Just like humans!

This parable demonstrates the love of God for us. We do not come to God through doing certain things and following certain rules. In fact, the exact opposite happens. Like the shepherd, Jesus goes out to find the sheep. When he finds it he rejoices and carries us home. In those times, the shepherd did not own the sheep personally. They belonged to his village or wider family. So it was important to make sure that every sheep was found. This can seem unfair to the other 99 sheep who don't stray. The shepherd leaves all the other sheep “in the open country”, while he goes to look for the lost sheep. The “open country” could be understood as a safe place however. There will be other shepherds there who could keep an eye on his herd. It is harder steal to sheep then. In New Zealand, sheep roam the open high country all through summer looking for food. We are free to roam, but Jesus knows exactly where we are.

The point of these parables

In verses 7 and 10, Jesus says the same thing. There is great rejoicing in Heaven over every sinner who repents. There are nearly 7 billion people in the world, but every single person matters. Every time someone puts their faith in Jesus, there is a victory.

Notes

1. Sheep were very valuable. Shepherds had to be good trackers and prevent sheep from being killed by wolves. This was very dangerous work.
2. This shepherd is moderately wealthy. Flocks were normally between 20 and 200 sheep.

Questions

1. Do you know the story of Shrek the sheep? What does this story tell us?
2. What impression do people have of sheep as an animal?
3. What do people today think that “to sin” means? What is “repentance?”
4. Many people go to see victorious teams return to the country. Why? Would the heavenly celebration be like that?

Conclusion

These two stories show how important we are to God and how important it is to be “found” by Jesus. We do not look for and find Jesus: he finds us. He is the good shepherd. However, we need to want to be found and willingly return with him. We need to be “unsheep-like” and not be stubborn and simply follow the latest fashion. As Christians we should use our brains, follow the truth and do what is right. Most of all, we hear Jesus calling us to him and we follow him.