

'THE REALLY GOOD LIFE'

(The Life of Christ Series)

The Gospel of Luke

'Celebration'

(What Makes You 'Party'?)

You can tell a lot about someone by what makes him or her rejoice. Like a thermometer reveals the temperature of a room, the source of one's joy says much about the spiritual condition of the heart. What is it that sets off a celebration in your heart, mind and soul? Is it successful business deal that earns you a pile of money? Maybe it's the victory of your favorite sports team? Or perhaps some new clothes, a new car, or some other material things get the party started in your heart. There is nothing wrong with enjoying nice things that God somehow sends our way (**James 1:17**), but do you also express joy over things that cause God great joy, too?

An old song says, '*Celebrate good times! Come on!*' Good times for true followers of the Lord Jesus Christ include spiritual things as well as material and personal blessings from God. When you hear that someone has trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior and Lord how do you feel inside and react outwardly? When someone has decided to dedicate their body and life to Jesus by being baptized, do you make every effort to attend and celebrate their new purpose for living? If someone shares publicly that he or she has been getting the victory over some old bad habit they've struggled with, does a *praise the Lord* or *amen* come naturally to your lips? When a Christian who has strayed away from the Lord, the Bible and church for a time comes back to Jesus and the church family, do you at least feel a passionate '*Thank You, Jesus!*' swell up in your heart?

Formal religion works hard to suppress all emotional demonstrations of joy, replacing it with somber, robotic performance of *the liturgy*. Religious traditionalists that structure out personal expression with stoic recitations and clerical pageantry are misrepresenting heaven and the eternally reverent celebration being led by God, the *LIFE of the party* above. Of course, different people show joy in different ways – some are more exuberant, some are more subdued, depending on their personalities. We should never try to dictate which way someone ought to express their *joy in the Lord* – there are clappers and there are non-clappers; there are hand-raisers and hands-downers; there are AMENers and ameners; there are kneelers, and there are sitters. It's not important how you show it – just so you feel the joy of the Lord that the Holy Spirit feels when good things of eternal importance happen among us. So the next time the joy of the Lord overflows within you, express (don't suppress) it in a way fitting your Christ-like personality. Try not to offend or frighten anybody around you of course, but by all means '*Celebrate God-times! Come on! Celebrate!*' (**1 Thessalonians 5:16, Philippians 4:4**)

'Well?! Come Home!'

(Jesus' parable of the 'Prodigal Son')

Luke 15:11-32

Synopsis: As the religious enemies of Jesus (*Pharisees and scribes of Judaism*) became more and more hostile, Christ refuted them with teaching in parables (*stories illustrating truth He wanted to convey*). With His 12 disciples and others listening in, Jesus explained to His adversaries in 3 parables why He actively sought to save sinful people they abhorred (**Luke 15**).

Review: The first parable of the lost sheep pictured Jesus the Son of God as the good Shepherd leaving the main flock to rescue the one sheep that was desperately seeking pasture and water not available in the spiritual wilderness environment of empty religious ritual. Jesus does what the self-righteous religious leaders wouldn't – seek, find and bring home repentant sinners who gladly let the Savior save them.

The second parable of a woman (*picture of God the Holy Spirit using the bride of Christ (to be known as the Church after Jesus' resurrection)*), to seek and find one lost coin, reconnect it with the other coins and put it back into circulation. This parable pictures a lost soul (*a coin*) with the image of God stamped upon him or her, being enlightened, cleansed, reclaimed through repentance and put back into circulation by God the Holy Spirit. In both cases the repentance of the lost individual brings immense rejoicing to heaven and all its residents (*in contrast with the criticism and disdain of the religious leaders toward the Lord Jesus*).

Today: '*The Lost Things Trilogy*' is completed with the parable of the '*prodigal son*'...

Prodigal Son – ‘Sin City, Here I Come!’

(Profile of a perishing soul) (11-24)

Rejection of the Faith (11-16)

¹¹ Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. ¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. ¹⁴ But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

‘Universal Grace’ (Matthew 5:45) All people are given life and the natural benefits life entails, but until ‘saved’, they squander it all as they depart further and further from God. **Talk about** how all people are born with earthly benefits of life but until they stop running from God, they waste and abuse this life.

Repentance from Sin(s) (17-21)

¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, ¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” ’ ²⁰ “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

‘Freewill’ God lets people abuse their freewill like the prodigal son. It isn’t God making their lives a mess; it’s their choice. **Talk about** why God lets people go their own way and lets them reach the ‘bottom of the barrel’ in life. **Talk about** the turning point for the prodigal. ‘When no one helped him, he came to his senses.’ **How** do well-meaning people sometimes interfere at this point and delay a sinner’s repentance?

Reconciled to the Father (22-24)

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. ²³ And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

‘Saving Grace’ All people get ‘universal grace’ at birth, but only those God brings to their senses about their sinful condition and rebellion against God get ‘saving grace.’ **TALK ABOUT** those who say they’re saved but still prefer the pig pen lifestyle—is this possible? (2 Peter 2:20-22). **DISCUSS** how the Father feels about truly repentant people and what He does for them when they are ‘found’ by saving grace.

Faithful Son – ‘Safe & Sound; Stay Home!’

(Profile of a spiritual ‘party pooper’) (25-30)

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ ²⁸ “But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰ But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’

HOW were the religious leaders like the elder son? **DID** the elder son also need to repent? **DID** the religious leaders? **WHICH** son needed to repent and be forgiven? **WHICH** are you most like (or were like prior to salvation)? **EXPLAIN** your answer.

Righteous Father – ‘Grace & Gifts: Stay Tuned’

(Profile of God, the Life of the party) (31-32)

³¹ “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³² It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’ ”

WHY do you think Jesus didn’t explain this parable as He did the first two? **DISCUSS** the possible endings for the parable. **WHAT** could the elder brother have done differently than just resent and criticize his younger brother?