

Title: RECEIVING SINNERS, LUKE 15:1-10
(Chatham, NJ; 09/15/13, AM) [Pc – Topical]

Theme: Jesus provided religiously minded people with an entirely new way of perceiving and welcoming those tainted with sin and depravity.

Purpose: To remind the church to adopt the same attitude toward sinners.

Introduction:

1. When things of value are lost (keys, cell phones, credit cards), we search frantically for them.
2. The stories of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin raise this issue.
3. Both are concerned for things of value.
4. The Lost Son, of course, demonstrates the value God puts on humans.
5. Nowhere else in the Gospels is God's wisdom on display more fully.
6. I want to balance my lesson today: for those who recognize their sin, this is great news; for those who have been in the church for some time, dealing with sinners may have become more difficult as we have become sensitized to sin.

I. The Divine/Human Way of Thinking about Sinners

A. God's way

1. The controversy begins in Mt. 9:9-13 at Matthew's house
2. It continues in Luke 15:1-2
3. The "sinners" were drawing near to hear him
4. The "pure ones" kept their distance from the "sinners"
5. They had an impulse to remain sinless

B. Lost things

1. The shepherd goes looking for the one lost sheep
2. More than economics? See John 10:11-15; Jesus cares for the sheep
3. A woman searches for a lost coin
4. Also more than economics? A dowry coin? Value to feed her family?
5. How about the value of a human soul? More than many sparrows, Mt. 10:31

C. Man's way

1. We see them as not valuable if they aren't pure enough
2. The church becomes the older brother over time (explain)
3. He refused to enter the party, 28
4. His excuses reveal jealousy, 29
5. His father explains, 31 – you have always had access to these things
6. The real difference, 32 – you have to understand that I care about the lost
7. We become the older brother because we forget our past sins

II. The Divine/Human Way of Dealing with Sinners

A. God's way in our hearts

1. All have sinned and fallen short, Romans 3:23
2. God leaves no one out of this judgment, even the most righteous-appearing persons among us
3. The human side of us wants to compare notes: "I may do this, but I'm not as bad as so-and-so"
4. God's way: Christ died for sinners, not the righteous, Romans 5:6
5. Human way: make sacrifices for those who deserve it

B. The divine and human about remembering sin

1. God forgives and remembers our sins no more, Heb. 10:18
2. God doesn't necessarily forget them; he doesn't count them against us
3. Humans never forget, and sometimes they keep bringing up all the old offenses
4. When some offense occurs, we say, "Last week (month, year) you did such-and-such and I'm mad about that one also."
5. We are much more into revenge than we like to think.
6. We can remember our own sins too much and be overwhelmed by the shame.
7. We can remember them too little and be judgmental of others, Mt. 7:1-5; we fail to see the log in our own eye.
8. Paul never forgot his sin, and it made him recognize grace, 1 Tim. 1:14
9. God's way: mercy for the merciful, Mt. 5:7, forgiveness for the forgiver, Mt. 6:14-15

C. Is the church prepared for the divine love for sinners?

1. Caught between keeping ourselves pure and separated from the world, yet being in the world to be salt and light to sinful humanity
2. Dealing with sinners is messy – witness the Corinthians
3. It can be tempting to us, Gal. 6:1
4. Yet we are called upon to bring sinners back, James 5:19-20

Conclusions:

1. Think very deeply about how much love the Good Shepherd has for lost and fallen humanity.
2. Are we willing to embrace lost souls in all their sinfulness?
3. Let us remember our own conversion; we too have sinned and fallen short.
4. The Gospel is for sinners of which we are many.
5. An invitation?