

As Christians

Luke 15:1-7

Preface

Today begins a new year; 2012. We have had a great year in the life of our church. But as we embark on a new year, we must once again ask ourselves what our Lord would have us do as Christians. "As Christians," how should we be?

Scripture

¹Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

³Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'⁷ 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 persons who do not need to repent.

Introduction

As expected, tax collectors and sinners were gathering around to hear what Jesus was teaching. Jesus said he came to save those who were hurting spiritually (heal the sick).

But the Pharisees and teachers (religious elite) were muttering among themselves. The word translated "muttering" literally means "complaining among themselves rather than openly.

The Bible is clear about how Christians should handle conflict. Just as Christ knew when the Pharisees were muttering, he knows when Baptist are muttering. So let there be no muttering among God's people.

Recognizing the sorry attitude of the Pharisees, Jesus presents three parables to emphasize God's love for the lost (lost sheep, lost coin and lost son).

We can learn some important things from this parable and the circumstances that lead to Christ teaching with it. These lessons teach us how we should conduct ourselves "As Christians."

Content

1. As Christians, we must avoid exclusiveness.

The Pharisees were complaining because Jesus was mingling with sinners. The fact that he had eaten in their homes infuriated the Pharisees. They could not associate with such low-life.

Notice Jesus was not joining in the sinner's wrong doing but rather reaching them publicly for change and healing. If you have to hide your associations, something is wrong.

The Pharisees considered themselves to be an elite group. You couldn't be a part of their group and have anything to do with sinners because they considered themselves to be righteous.

As a church, we must avoid such thinking at all costs. Many of you are kin to one another. The family ties are a wonderful characteristic of our church. However, we must never fall into a mindset of exclusiveness. We must have our arms open wide to all people God sends our way.

The fact is we need more sinners; more people who need salvation to enter the doors of our church. We must never consider ourselves too exclusive to welcome those seeking the Lord.

Illus: Thomas Graves story.

I have found if someone comes my way that I am not comfortable with, I had better be careful. Chances are God sent them into my life for a reason and I would do well to serve God's purpose.

2. As Christians, we must be concerned for the lost.

The central point of this parable is God's deep love and concern for the lost. That point must not be overlooked.

The parable emphasizes the personal nature of our relationship with God. Each one of us is individually important to God. And, each one of us must come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Each of us must make the decision to make him Lord of our life. No one else can do it for us.

We may have been raised in the church. We may have a certificate on the wall that says we never missed Sunday School. Your father may have built the church. But, no religious heritage will make you saved. Each of us individually must come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ; a personal one on one relationship with the Savior.

Though the Pharisees considered these people "hopeless," Christ did not. Christ was concerned about their spiritual health.

This parable enlightens us as to just how concerned God is about reaching the lost. And, as a church we must be equally concerned. We must be about the business of reaching the lost outside the walls of this church.

We must reach out to our children and grandchildren. We must never stop telling them about God's love for them and we must remain diligent in inviting them to church so they can know Christ.

If all of heaven rejoices when one person comes to know Christ, should not our church rejoice as well? If God seeks out the lost and desires for them to know Christ, should not our church be busy helping the Shepherd find the lost?

May everything we do As Christians and as a church be centered on reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. As Christians, we all need repentance.

There is a strange irony to this parable.

⁷ 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 persons who do not need to repent.

The Bible says "there are none righteous, no not one." The Pharisees considered themselves above repentance. In reality, they needed repentance just as much as those they were condemning.

Illus: Yesterday I traveled to Florida with some friends to feed their cows. There were four of us in the truck and on the way back we discussed stopping for a snack and bathroom break. Three of us wanted to stop and one did not. Ironically, the first one to jump out of the truck and go to the restroom was the one who did not want to stop. Those of us who needed to go waited impatiently in line outside the door while he took his sweet time in the men's room. When he finally came out, he went straight to the drink cooler and then grabbed a snack?

In the same way, the Pharisees had sin in their life as well and needed repentance. And one of their most obvious sins was their arrogance and lack of concern for others. Their refusal to repent led them to putting Christ on the cross. They considered themselves so elite and so religious yet they ignored the signs and could not recognize the Messiah.

God is rejoicing over a sinner repenting while the Pharisees are muttering (complaining) about it.

This should be a reminder to each one of us that we also need to repent of our sins. We need to recognize our sins and confess them privately before God.

Conclusion

Illus: Jackie Robinson was the first African American to play baseball in the major leagues. Breaking baseball's color barrier, he faced hostile crowds in every stadium. While playing one day in his home stadium of Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, he committed an error. The fans began to jeer him. He stood at second base, humiliated, while the crowd booed. Then, without saying a word, shortstop Pee Wee Reese bravely went over and stood next to Jackie. He put his arm around him and faced the crowd. Suddenly the fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that that arm around his shoulder saved his career.

As Christians, we need to listen to the Lord and do the right thing and be concerned about the lost.