

God's Treatment Plan for Spiritual Renewal - Part 4

Luke 15:1-7

Delivered by Dr. Daniel Kitinoja at Calvary Baptist Church, Tilton, IL
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If you have your copy of the scriptures, join me, if you would, in Luke chapter 15.

Luke chapter 15.

One of the things that you notice, if you have ever read the Bible, is that you will see that Jesus uses word pictures.

He uses illustrations and images to talk about things, including about people.

But Jesus is not unique in this.

Even in our culture in recent days, recent years anyway, people have spoken about people and used images to describe them.

Back in around the year 2000, I don't know when it was, there was a music group called Smash Mouth, and they said, hey now, you're a rock star.

And then not to be outdone, in the 1980s, some of you guys may remember this name, Carl Sagan.

He was an atheist scientist, and he denied the existence, or he denied God and denied that there was a creator.

He just said, but we're all star stuff.

And then in recent years, there's a singer named Moby.

He said, we are all made of stars.

And we see this in our culture.

Sometimes people just say, well, he's a beast.

And that's actually, that's a compliment.

And I don't know what the kids are saying now.

Kenny tried to explain some of the terminology of the younger folks, and I don't get it.

But the idea of speaking about people using images is not unique to our culture.

Jesus did this.

In fact, he's a better source.

And here's, there's two words that he's going to describe that we're going to see.

He's two words he's going to use to describe people.

Salt and sheep.

Salt and sheep.

And we're looking at Luke 15.

It's a well-known parable.

But one of the things happens as I was looking back over and I realized in the context, the context started with describing people as salt.

And then it went over to talking about sheep.

You see, the backstory of our passage dealing with sheep is actually Jesus' teaching about salt.

So we're going to read Luke 14, 34, 35, but understand that backstory.

That gives us context as to what he's saying and what he's doing and what he's teaching in Luke 15.

He says, salt is good, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?

It is of no use either for soil or for the manure pile.

That's a good way of saying it's good for nothing.

It is thrown away.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Let's pray.

Father in heaven, I thank you for today and I thank you for the joy that I heard in the house of the Lord today.

We thank you for the cleansing blood of the Lamb and what Jesus did for us on that cross.

I thank you for the fact that the scriptures teach us what we need to know about you, about ourselves, our salvation.

They give us skills, but they also challenge our attitudes.

I pray that today you would help us to be transformed by hearing from Jesus this morning.

It's in his name we pray.

Amen.

So what is going on?

Why is he calling people salt?

If you remember, there's a thing called the Sermon on the Mount.

He tells the people who are listening, who are trying to, they want to know what God wants them to do.

And Jesus says, you are the salt of the world.

You are the light of the world, the salt of the earth.

And what is he talking about?

Well, salt is a preserving agent.

So if you were to go to the grocery store today and get the good turkey, the kind that you buy at a deli counter, I don't even know if deli counters are around anymore.

But you got the good kind of meat at a deli counter, there's less preservatives in it.

And so even if you put it in a refrigerator, it will start to rot sort of quickly.

Now imagine you're in the ancient world and there's no refrigerators.

Now you salt everything to keep it preserved.

And so when he says that you are the salt of the earth, he's saying you by your conduct, your attitudes and the way you function in society, you're a preserving agent.

In a world that's known injustice, in a world that has sin and death and deception and all of this hostility, you are the salt of the earth.

There's rot, but you are the preserving agent.

The way you function in your home, the way you function at your job and in society and your

school boards and all of those things, you're a preserving agent.

But then Jesus asked this question, what if the salt loses its saltiness?

Then what do we do?

What if all the people in the world that are supposed to be trying to function, to hold it together, loses its saltiness?

They no longer know what's right from wrong.

And if they do know right from wrong, they don't have the will to accept it and to live it out.

And what happens?

What do we do?

Is there hope for people who have lost their saltiness?

And that's sort of the backstory.

Is there hope for people who have lost their saltiness?

Years ago, I was at a youth conference, and they had this evangelist come in, and I'd never heard him before.

His name was John Stroop.

And he came in, and he kind of was dressed like me and no tie on.

And you saw all these prison tattoos on his neck.

Actually, they were gang tattoos, as it would turn out.

While John was in prison, he comes to know the Lord Jesus Christ, and he who was this legit, bad, non-salt of the earth guy, he comes to Jesus Christ.

But not only does he believe in Jesus, he starts, I'm going to follow him.

I believe in him by faith for salvation.

He believed the gospel.

Here's the simple gospel message.

Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose again.

He believed that by faith, but now he said, I'm going to follow Jesus.

What happened with John Strupe is he starts to become the salt of the earth.

The man who was not salty, but was in fact a wrath on society is now the preserving agent.

He starts preaching the gospel and we start seeing people, they are paying attention.

It's hard to ignore a guy like him.

Not only does he get saved, not only is he preaching, then he starts this ministry at his Baptist Church, which I kind of was afraid he would scare Baptist people.

And I think maybe he did because later he started to put the tie on and cover up.

But on Saturday nights, they send out vans and they go pick up other people who need to regain their saltiness.

And they feed them and they preach to them and they worship.

And then the people who come to faith in Christ, they're disciplined so that they can become salty too.

But not to be outdone, one of the disciples of that ministry went to a church that I used to serve on as a youth pastor.

And he is now the pastor there and this church is growing like crazy.

Salt of the earth.

But freeway ministers, then now there's several of these freeway ministers.

There's even one in South Africa, the salt of the earth, John Stroop.

Before Christ, he had lost his saltiness.

And why do I like, one of the things about preachers, we like the elaborate stories.

Why?

Because if John Stroop can become the salt of the earth, then so can you.

You can be the come the guy who the wife can trust, the one that the children can look to.

You can become the person that others look to to keep things going.

But without Christ, well, we're nothing.

I never spent time in jail, but I will tell you something.

A few years back, I was thinking about how I was at 22, 23, and 24.

And I said, Oh, man, how did I not get punched in the mouth more frequently?

So I went on Facebook one day and I just said, if you knew me when I was 23, I'm sorry.

If God can change John Strupe and he can change Dan Kanoia, there's nobody that can't become salty.

But the question seems hopeless.

And so now with that context in mind, he says something amazing.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.

Well, apparently these people who had lost their saltiness, hear Jesus and they start coming to him.

And I want you to catch this.

It causes a problem for the religious folks.

They lose their minds.

Luke 15, let's read.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to him.

And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

What's the big deal here?

Well, there's a lot of big deal.

Number one, the tax collectors.

Now, if you've watched The Chosen, I will say this.

I can't endorse everything in The Chosen show because I haven't seen it all.

But the way they portrayed Levi, the tax collector, Matthew.

Oh, it's cool.

His family hates him because he's a tax collector.

The tax collectors didn't, they're not just IRS agents who may or who intimidate us.

IRS agents intimidate me.

I'm glad I don't get letters from them saying, you kind of messed something up here.

But I did once and it terrified me.

But these guys paid money to the Roman government so they could be tax collectors.

And then they abused their authority against their brothers.

Yeah, they hated them.

They're Benedict Arnold's and worse.

And so now these tax collectors who are not the salt of the earth, who are crooks and traitors are coming to Jesus.

And then it says the sinners.

Well, that's a generic term because like you look at this and if you're, if you know anything from, if you've been in Sunday School class, you know, like, well, I think we're all sinners, right?

Well, here's the thing.

To say sinner, that's just a garden variety term that says, these people are known as sinners.

They're not known as post workers who sin sometimes.

Their life is known as this.

Such that they are excluded from the religious community.

But now Jesus shows up and he says, hey, if people have lost their saltiness, is there any hope for them?

He who has ears to hear, let them hear.

And they come to Jesus.

They may not know everything there is to know about Jesus, but they were attracted.

And they said, is there hope for me?

I want you to know, there is hope for you.

Because if God can change me or he can change my father, or John Strupe, or anybody that I could point to in this church, he can change you.

You want to know something funny, when I look at the Bible, the sin that God seems to hate the most is pride.

And the religious people in this text are prideful.

See, one of the things about Christian discipleship, I sat down last night, and it was last night or this morning, I said, what are we even doing here?

Like, what's discipleship?

Because sometimes you read so many books, you just need, what's the bottom line?

Knowledge, skills, and attitudes of Christians, right?

So the attitude was this.

Their attitude was sinners bad, keep them away.

And Jesus says, no, no, no, the right attitude is we welcome them.

So, they show up and they're hap...

My first notes on this, I just wrote, Jesus is having the time of his life with these people.

Because he is.

Now, I'm not saying he's drinking with them or anything like that.

The sinners are showing up and he's happy.

Right?

Sinners were naturally attracted to Jesus.

He was loving and gracious even when he was telling them the hard truth.

I think he probably spoke it with a lot of grace.

The people he did not seem to have grace for or the prideful.

See, lost people are more attracted to Jesus when we, his followers, welcome them as he does.

One of the things I was thinking about the other day, most people after they've come to faith in Christ within two or three years, they don't have any friends who aren't Christians.

Guilty is charged.

Everybody I know, everybody I work with closely, as far as I know, you're all believers in Jesus Christ.

And this is one of the challenges that some people outside of the church think that we are not welcoming to them.

Can I just tell you, A, number one, that's not true.

Was I afraid that we might not be?

They're afraid that we're going to be like these religious people in the text who are like, how come Jesus is hanging out with sinners?

And I'm like, if he didn't hang out with sinners, he wouldn't have any friends, besides God, the Father and the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus is attracting people to him, and when God's people become more like him, we are more attractive.

That doesn't always mean they're going to like what we're going to teach.

But godly people, as far as they understood, were supposed to avoid sinners.

But Jesus is, this is a party.

He's partying with them, because they were repenting of sin.

They didn't know everything that they knew that they needed to be different, and they didn't know if they knew it wasn't in them, but there was something about Jesus that said, I can be salty again if I hang out with this guy.

He can teach me what mom didn't teach me.

He can teach me what dad didn't teach me.

He can undo the messed up thinking that I've got.

See, when they came to Jesus, I want you to catch this.

They still needed transformation, but you know what happens with us?

I don't know about you.

I'm different than I was when I was 23, but I hope that when I'm 50, which is not that far from now, by the way, I hope that my Christian knowledge, skills, and attitude are greater at 50 than they are at 48.

I hope that I'm saltier.

See, when we come to faith in Jesus Christ, we got to catch the, we got to reckon with this.

The stuff that you did the day before you came to Jesus Christ, sometimes God dramatically delivers people, but most of the time, it's a slow process.

I'll give you one example of a time a person I know who was addicted to drugs had this dramatic experience and was different from that on.

A lady named Arsha, she was a drug addict.

She's a friend of a friend of our family.

She's gone home to be with Jesus, has shared her testimony so I can tell you.

If I didn't know her, I probably wouldn't believe the story, but I know her.

She went to pick up her phone to make a drug deal.

And right before she picked up the phone, God says to her, if you make that phone call, you will die today.

She picks up the phone and somehow, this is when we had pay phones.

Somehow there was a drug and alcohol rehab clinic on the other line.

Marcia got saved, gave her life to Jesus, and her son Danny is a missionary in Europe.

She became salty, but she was undoubtedly a sinner.

See, we still need transformation, but when we come to faith in Jesus, we are redeemed simply by believing the gospel message.

Now, if that sounds too easy, well, it's easy for you, but not easy for Christ because he had to die in our place.

The just for the unjust.

It is what happens after that where we regain the salt.

So the people are messed up, they're upset about this, and in verse 3–6, Jesus responds to their complaint about his new friends.

He's got bad company.

Verse 3–6.

So, he told them this parable.

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

By the way, the people he's talking to looked at shepherds as lowly people, a disgusting trade.

Necessary maybe, but gross.

Verse 5.

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing, and when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

He's saying, listen, this is Jesus' point.

Just like you, I look for precious things that are lost.

And lost people, although they may have lost their saltiness, they may be drug dealers, they may be in a gang, they may just be prideful religious people.

They are precious to me.

And so I went looking for him.

And then he tells this story, hey, look, the shepherds, they'll go leave the sheep, 99, in search of the one lost sheep.

That's what I'm doing.

And the question behind all this is, hey, this is what God sent me to do.

The Father has sent me to do this.

Are you going to celebrate with me?

That's the underlying question.

That's the attitude adjustment that they needed.

But he tells this story, and you can imagine it.

Sheep are not smart, number one.

They're also blind, not blind, but their vision is terrible, and they have no defensive weapons.

So now you get one off of way on their social creatures.

So now they're away from the pack.

They're not smart, but they're pretty sure they're in trouble.

Sheep that are lost are lonely.

They're scared.

They're erratic.

Sound like people?

So it'd be easier if you weren't too far from the pack, apparently.

I'm not a sheep.

I'm not a shepherd, but I'm not a sheep.

I don't work with sheep.

That's what I'm trying to say.

Not literal sheep anyway.

It'd be easy if they were close to the pack to just lead it as it would turn out when they're far from the pack, and because they're social creatures and they're scared, they're very erratic.

So what does the shepherd do?

He just picks it up and puts it on the shoulders.

That's a whole lot easier.

I can imagine maybe a sheep running into the shepherd because he's just scared and doesn't know what he's doing, but he picks it up and now he's happy.

He goes back to his friends and he says, I found the sheep.

Celebrate with me.

He says, what the shepherd does, that's what I'm doing.

I've come to seek and to save that which is lost.

And now that I've found them, I'm celebrating.

He says, basically, my actions are natural because I'm looking for lost people the way a shepherd looks for lost sheep.

Like lost sheep, lost people are in danger, although they don't often think so, right?

And they are in emotional, mental and spiritual distress, hurting, angry, lonely, tired.

Admittedly, when you show up, sometimes they try to ram into you, try to, hey, once you come to Jesus, why don't you come to church?

And sometimes they ram you.

But I want to tell you something, most people are not doing that.

It turns out 66% of Americans, they studied this out, and this is consistently repeated over and over.

Two-thirds of Americans are willing to go to church, or at least consider if a friend invites them.

Since most of us can't just pick up people and carry them to church, you can invite them.

And what gets all the attention is the angry people on social media will yell at you and want to debate you.

That's a small percentage, that's a very small percentage.

It just gets noticed more.

Most people are either going to say, no thanks, but two-thirds will say, I'll think about it.

And what you're doing is you are partnering with the shepherd in reaching that which is lost.

When we think about people, one of the things I often talk about is, I like to express it this way, when God created humans, he designed us with a plan and a purpose in mind.

And when we lived according to his plan and purpose, it's the place of blessing.

But when we deviate from God's plan, the Bible has a word for that, it's called sin.

And that sin leads to brokenness.

And it looks like relationships that are broken, it looks like emotions that are broken, it looks like anxiety, fear, hatred, bitterness, unforgiveness, the stuff that we can't get over.

It looks like a lot of things.

We see it individually, we see it in families, we see it in society.

There's a lot of brokenness.

And I want you to catch this, our attempts to fix what's broken without Jesus leads to more brokenness.

And so while that's bad news, Jesus is saying, hey, listen, you're like a lost sheep.

You're broken, you're hurt, you're angry, lonely, tired.

I've come to rescue you.

Won't you come home with me?

Won't you come be a part of my family?

Then Jesus starts to show us, here's how you live.

Here's what the emotions are.

When you're in this circumstance and this person acts this way, yeah, they're kind of being a jerk, but here's a better way to handle it.

Jesus starts to show us how to function in our relationship, how to handle finances, how we handle bosses that are not always easy to work for.

I've had one, Jesus is my boss, but I had other bosses in the world that are not always fun to work for.

And Jesus can show you, here's how you handle that boss.

Here's how you think about your finances.

And He starts teaching you, here's the way to live.

But so long as we stay away from Jesus, we're going to kind of be in that zone where we're just constantly hurting, angry, lonely, tired, and we try different things to fix it.

Just leads us right back to square one.

When Jesus is looking for lost sheep, and what He's telling these people with this parable is, what He's telling us, just as lost sheep are precious to a shepherd, and lost people are precious to me.

I once was lost, but now I'm found.

Christians, aren't you glad Jesus cares about lost people?

Because if He didn't, you'd still be lost.

And what Jesus is inviting them to, and I think us too, is to be as excited about it as Jesus is.

But I want to catch one really cool thing.

Sometimes I can be critical, and I don't want to be critical today.

Can I tell you what happens when somebody says, hey, I'm a believer in Jesus Christ, and we've talked to him and decided a little bit, and they say, I want to get baptized.

Well, it usually happens when they get a bottle of water.

Everyone goes nuts.

That's like the touchdown.

That's winning the Super Bowl for the church.

Because what that means is lost sheep have come home, and they are saying, I am going to follow Jesus.

That is our attitude.

Now, people who come into our church don't know that, and sometimes we don't think about that.

But here's a good reminder.

That's our attitude.

We celebrate those moments because that's the Super Bowl for us.

And so this is what Jesus is about.

He says, I'm celebrating because I found what I was looking for.

And his challenge to them is basically, if you were my friends, you would be celebrating too, not clutching your pearls.

And verse 7, he says, essentially, it is only natural that I celebrate because that is what heaven is doing.

Look at verse 7.

Just so I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

Heaven is seeking to rescue.

It's on a seek and save mission, not a seek and destroy mission.

Sometimes as a preacher, I need to remind myself that because I come time, by now you've come to know I sometimes hit stuff hard, and I think there's a place for that.

But Jesus gets this is on a seek and save mission, not a seek and destroy.

The judgment comes later, and that's His business, not mine.

But still, we speak plainly about sin and call people to repent so that they can be saved.

In John 3.16, Jesus says, For God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

But verse 17 continues of thought, and He basically just says, Hey, I've come in the world to save it, not to destroy it.

Now, the judgment comes later, but heaven is on a seek and rescue mission.

Heaven's agenda is to see lost people like us come to faith in Jesus.

And when we see where it says heaven is celebrating it, He's talking about God, the Father and

the angels celebrating when the lost who were in danger are now safe with Jesus.

Interesting thing, when in the Garden of Eden, when it describes God walking around in the cool of the day after Adam and Eve have sinned, the way the Hebrew text is written, I'm not smart enough, my Hebrew professor told me this, is describing God as being like this anxious parent walking back and forth.

Where are my kids?

Parents ever been there?

So what God is celebrating is that which was lost coming home.

That's another sermon for another day.

I got lost in an amusement park once.

I know my parents were mad at me, but their excitement that they found me seemed to overrule that, for which I was glad, because it was my fault.

Heaven is celebrating.

God the Father celebrates when people come home to Jesus for salvation.

So let's think this through.

How does this apply to us?

These are some truths that transform from this text.

When we embrace Jesus' mission to reach the lost, we will become like Jesus.

See, we've been in this series talking about God's Treatment Plan for Spiritual Renewal.

Embracing the mission that Jesus has is the medicine.

And when we embrace His mission, we become more like Him.

Jesus, you see, welcomes sinners.

In fact, He is seeking them.

So much so that He died on a cross for them.

A lot of people don't fully get the weight of this.

Romans 5, 8 says that while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

The shepherd died for the sheep and was raised to new life.

That death was to pay for our sins so that we could be made right with God.

And so Jesus welcomes us.

In fact, He is looking for us.

He rescues people through the church today.

He's a work through the church.

Matthew 28, 18–20, Jesus has just risen from the dead.

He meets with the disciples and he says, go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

That's conversion.

Teaching them to observe or obey everything that I've commanded you.

I'll be with you always to the end of the age.

Jesus has sent us out to rescue lost people through us.

Then we should celebrate when people repent and come to Christ.

Thinking about this idea that Jesus seeks the lost through us.

One of the things that's happening next month is Easter Sunday, Resurrection Sunday, as my dad taught me to call it.

One of the things I've done, Jesus said he's going to make us fishers of men.

I've made some louvers.

In a minute after the services are over, I'm going to ask those who took up the offering to come back and help me pass these out.

These cards, it's just an invitation to come to our Easter service.

Gives the service times, the website.

Where's what I'm going to ask you to do?

I'm going to ask everyone to take one or pass them out.

I've made up probably twice as many as we need today.

I'm going to ask you to take one.

Pray for one person that God would have you get invite to church on Easter Sunday, and then give it to them and invite them.

If you give that one out or you're like, no, I got like five, I'm going to take five.

Well, we're going to hand out one, but there's some more in the back over there and some more over here.

If I have to, I'll get false stitch to make more.

It's a lure, an invitation.

When they come, invite them to sit with you.

You can meet them in the parking lot.

You could pick them up.

Easter Sunday is one of this big Sundays where people come to church.

So we're anticipating that our praise team is already preparing for that.

This is a simple thing that we can do to partner with Jesus and his mission to seek and to save that which was lost.

And sometimes what is lost are one of the gray areas.

I'll call it a gray area because I don't know what's in a person's heart or mind.

When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, but for a season, it seems to be wandering like sheep and baa, or far from the pack.

You start to wonder, are they a believer or not?

I don't know the answer, ultimately.

Only God does.

But a person who's made a profession of faith, got baptized and seemed to wander, hey, until

they come back home, we keep reaching out to them.

So if a person says, I'm a Christian, great, come to church.

But if you know they're not a Christian, invite them to church.

Here's what's going to happen.

I'm going to present the gospel.

I'm going to have a very simple sermon on Easter Sunday.

I'm going to ask and answer four questions.

You're ready?

Number one, was there a person named Jesus?

Number two, did he really die?

Did he rise?

Number four, what difference does it make?

Then I'm going to invite them to put their trust in Jesus.

As a church, we partner together with Jesus to seek and to save that which is lost.

Finally, as Alex and the praise team come for one more song of worship.

If you're a person who's, maybe you've never put your faith in Jesus Christ and you know, I'm not perfect.

It's not like I killed anybody.

I know I'm not perfect.

Regardless of what you're saying is, you know, just like I know about myself, you're a sinner.

And what that means is that you are a sheep who has strayed from Jesus, just like I did.

But Jesus came into the world.

He lived a sinless life, died on a cross in your place and in mine.

And he rose again the third day.

What God wants you to do is put your trust in Jesus.

And once you've trusted in him, to follow him.

This morning, if you'd like to put your trust in Jesus, you can do it right there at your seat.

Call on him.

Say, Lord God, I believe that Jesus died on the cross for my sins and rose again.

Make a determination that you're going to trust in him and follow him.

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