

August 19, 2012
“Let’s Celebrate!”
Luke 15:7 (NIV)

There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

At first there seems to be something not quite right with this verse...don’t you think? I mean, it’s wonderful when there is a new believer in Christ, but what about us old believers? Shouldn’t the old righteous make heaven just as happy as the new righteous ones do?

The answer to that question is no. The verse says there is more rejoicing for the newly saved one. And if that is the case, if there is a bigger celebration in heaven for the new believer; if that is what really gets heaven jumping, excited and happy, then shouldn’t it do the same for us too?

If we want joy to revolve around us, we’ll be less than happy. True joy is centered in God, in His character, and His passions. To know the joy of the Lord is to get excited about the same things that gladden His heart – like when people respond with faith to the Good News about Jesus Christ. This scripture clearly says that God rejoices more over one sinner who turns from their life of sin to give their life to Christ and becomes a new believer than He does over the old ones. So let’s get with the program.

Let’s not be like the brother of the prodigal son.

Luke 15:25-32 NLT

25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, 26 and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 27 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the calf we were fattening and has prepared a great feast. We are celebrating because of his safe return.'

28 "The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, 29 but he replied, 'All these years I've worked hard for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. 30 Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the finest calf we have.'

31 "His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you and I are very close, and everything I have is yours. 32 We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!' "

This son didn't get it, while his brother had just one day of celebration, the older brother was always with his father. He should have been rejoicing that his brother could now be with the father always too. He missed out on the party. Why would anyone want to miss out on a party? I had a business for a while and I had hired a young man, named Joe, to work for me. I began to share how Christ had changed my life. I had been working hard to ruin my life, then someone told me about Jesus. I asked Jesus to forgive me and save me... and He did. I had a new life as well as the hope of eternal life. Joe seemed open to listen and even discuss God, the world, and spiritual things, but was not ready to become a follower of Jesus. I spoke to him often and was getting pretty frustrated that I didn't seem to be getting anywhere with him.

Then one night, a busy night, I was still working, but he was done with his clients for the day. As I was rushing around, I handed him a prayer and said, here read this. Then I went back to what I was doing. Here was the prayer:

“Dear Father, I need You. I acknowledge that I have sinned against You by directing my own life. I thank You that You have forgiven my sins through Christ's death on the cross for me. I now invite Christ to again take His place on the throne of my life. Fill me with the Holy Spirit as You **commanded** me to be filled, and as You **promised** in Your Word that You would do if I asked in faith. I pray this in the name of Jesus. As an expression of my faith, I now thank You for directing my life and for filling me with the Holy Spirit.”

At the end of the prayer it said this: “Does this prayer express the desire of your heart? If so, bow in prayer and trust God to fill you with the Holy Spirit **right now.**”

I noticed he was reading the prayer, but wasn't really expecting much to come of it; and because I was busy, I paid no further attention to him or what he was doing.

My wife, Ann also worked with me and came over to me and said, “I think Joe just accepted the Lord.” I said, “What? How do you know?” She said, “He's acting kind of strange.” I said, what do you mean? She pointed out that though it was winter and it was snowing, Joe with a huge grin on his face and without wearing a coat, was outside clearing the snow off my car, his car, my custom's car, and complete strangers' cars with his bare hands. I didn't know that was a sign that one had become a new convert to Christ so I ignored my wife's observation. But I did notice that Joe seemed a lot happier than he usually did. Actually that's an understatement. He was giddy, joyful.

It was a Saturday and we didn't work on Sunday or Monday, but on Tuesday not only did he share with me that he had indeed accepted Christ, but directly from work that Saturday he went to his girlfriend's house told her what happened and she accepted Christ too.

I said, well we kind of noticed you were cleaning snow off your car so we figured you must have received Christ. And he said he was so full of joy he probably could have ran the 5 miles to his girlfriend's house without his car.

Well, this gave me great joy too. I felt like I was swept up in the party that was going on in Heaven. The only thing better than being in the Kingdom of God myself is seeing someone else arrive. People coming to Christ and finding hope in a personal relationship with God is cause for continual rejoicing.

In Luke 15 Jesus tells three parables: the story of the lost sheep, the story of the lost coin, and the story of the lost son. Each story has to do with repentance and at the end of each story we are invited to rejoice.

Luke 15:6 NLT

Call together your friends and neighbors to rejoice with you because your lost sheep was found.

Luke 15:9 NLT

She will call in her friends and neighbors to rejoice with her because she has found her lost coin.

Luke 15:23b-24 NLT

We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found. So the party began.

At the heart of the Kingdom of Heaven, a celebration is going on. What's the occasion? It's not that all wars have ended, it is not that suffering has ended. No, the cause for the party is that one lost sheep has come home. And since every second, somewhere in the world, someone is turning to Christ, therefore, there is always a celebration going on in heaven. Joy throws a big party over one person, one new follower of Christ, one earth-shattering change in a human heart. That alone is cause for continual rejoicing. Stop being so somber and join the party/partying of angels.

What we see in today's verse is the reality that God's Kingdom values one lost person. God rejoices when people are "found" and brought into His Kingdom. He rejoices over you! When someone repents - turns from sin and accepts the forgiveness Jesus offers -- heaven rejoices. While there is certainly joy over those already safe in the kingdom, there is "more joy" for each changed life.

Picture yourself in both roles. As the lost sheep, you need a Shepherd-Savior to bring you home. As a shepherd, you have a job to do, and all heaven rejoices when you find a lost person, just as heaven did when you were found.

In the shepherd's role, take a step beyond your comfort zone today. Start a conversation with a stranger, greet a neighbor, speak to the person going through your garbage looking for bottles and cans, take a drug addict for a cup of coffee.

And if you're better cast in the lost-sheep role today, follow the Savior's voice home without delay or detour.

In the bulletin today there are two inserts I'd like you to take out and look at. One is an invitation to a Dinner Party we are having here on September 12. Notice the topic, "Is There More to Life Than This? After we serve you an incredible dinner we are going to listen to a talk on this subject. I want to invite you to come, you are all invited. Just fill out the insert (we want to make sure we have enough food).

The second insert is a way to start planning for a party in heaven. Ask God to put on your heart someone that you should share His love with and to invite to our Dinner Party with you on

September 12. As a matter of fact let's do that right now. Take a moment to think about individuals you know and would like to introduce Christ to. List their names twice. One copy is for you so you will remember to pray for them, and share with them, and invite to Alpha. The other copy I'd like you to tear off and place in the basket on the altar. This will be a reminder for us to pray for them each Sunday. Let's Pray.