**Rejoicing Over Repent Sinners**

Based on [Luke 15:1-11](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Lk15.1-11)

Preached on June 17, 2018

Third Sunday after Trinity

Pastor Nathan Fuehrer

This Gospel is about how Jesus Christ came, not to congratulate the righteous, but to save sinners who repent. And as even one sinner who repents is cause for great celebration among the angels of heaven; so it ought to be among the saints on earth.

(1) Jesus Christ has come, not to congratulate the righteous, but to save sinners who repent. This may sound strange, because we know that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God;” and that “none are righteous, no not one.” So when it says that the tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to Jesus, and that the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling about it, you might think Jesus would simply say to them, “**Hey you grumbling hypocrites, stop judging these tax collectors and sinners…you’re just as bad a sinner as they are.**”

But he doesn’t, and so our minds should not go there. Jesus acknowledges a difference between sinners and the righteous before men. “Sinner”, in the sense the Pharisees use it, is someone who has adopted a lifestyle of openly practicing sin, and by that standard, not all men are sinners. The Pharisees and Scribes, by all accounts, kept the Law of Moses religiously as they say, or at least tried to and thought they did. Tax Collectors, however, literally stole from their neighbors for a living, breaking the seventh commandment, as their employment. Prostitutes made money off of practicing sexual immorality which is adultery.

Jesus doesn’t dispute the distinction between those who are sinful by nature “all men” and those “who make a public vocation of sinning.” 1 Peter says, “**If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?**” (4:18). And 1 John says, “**Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness…no one who abides in him keeps on sinning**” (1 John 3:4, 6). Yes there is a distinction to be made, even today, between those who are poor miserable sinners, which is everyone; and those who make sinning a lifestyle, who are today, not necessarily tax collectors…but illegal drug users and dealers, prostitutes, gay pride activists and supporters, transgendered lobbyists and crusaders, these are public sinners.

I teach this now because it is very relevant today, as a confusion and prevarication of these categories is the source of much false teaching. There are those who believe and behave as though “we’re all sinners” is the gospel and the only thing that Jesus came to teach. **And they would use today’s gospel to teach that “we’re all sinners, so let’s not judge one another, but accept everyone for who they are, and where they are in their journey with Jesus.”** This is just another form of self-justification and making excuses for your sin. Just as the Pharisee would justify himself with the thought “at least I’m not as bad as the tax collector”; now the adulterer would justify himself with the though “At least the faithful husband is just as bad as me.”

If you find your comfort in comparing yourselves to others, either by regarding yourselves better than them or no better than them, you are delusional. You all will stand alone before God on Judgment day, and God will not judge you in comparison to anyone else, only with respect to repentance and faith in Christ his Son. And the sin of the Pharisees--the idea that you kept the law better than other sinners--is just as irrelevant to your salvation as the idea that all sinners are equal.

All this to say, Jesus doesn’t simply go around calling everyone sinners as though that is some great news. He’s not a modern liberal protestant. **And so hear this: the Pharisees and Scribes would not be wrong in rebuking and refusing to eat with those who make sin a lifestyle.** Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5:11 of those who make a lifestyle of sin, “Do not even eat with such a one.” But that’s not what’s happening here. What’s happening here is that those who had made sin their lifestyle were coming to Jesus to repent. And Jesus accepts their repentance, and restores them immediately into the kingdom of God, and that is why the Pharisees grumble.

So Jesus tells two parables that make clear that his practice of eating with tax collectors and public sinners is not about validating sinful lifestyles, as the Pharisees slanderously accuse him of with contempt, and the modern liberal teach about him with approval. Their condemnation is just. **No, this Gospel is about how repentance--renouncing all sin and drawing near to Jesus for forgiveness--is available to all.**  And when the Holy Spirit grants the gift of repentance to even the most notorious of sinners, Jesus welcomes him and immediately justifies the sinner before God in heaven, and it ought to justify the sinner before men on earth as well.

The first teaching is that repentance which is simply renouncing all sin and returning to God through forgiveness in Christ, immediately restores even the greatest public sinner to a right relationship with God. **And should that person sin again seventy seven times a day and repent, he is immediately forgiven, welcomed into the arms of Christ and the fellowship of the saints, and the angels in heaven rejoice seventy seven times.**

(2) The second teaching is that, since repentance restores sinners to God and causes much celebration in heaven, it ought to have the same effect on earth. This is where Jesus is rebuking the Pharisees. He doesn’t say, **“You are sinners in need of repentance just like they are, so stop judging them and repent**.” Instead, he says “all the angels in heaven are rejoicing that I have brought these sinners to repentance, why aren’t you? Why aren’t you rejoicing that these tax collectors are leaving their booths to follow me? Why aren’t you celebrating that adulterers are going forth to sin no more on account of me?” Why instead do you grumble at this?

Today’s Gospel doesn’t give the answer. It is provided extensively elsewhere in the parable of the Prodigal Son. The reason for the Pharisee’s grumbling at the salvation of repentant sinners is also in the parable of the laborers in the vineyard and in the seven woes of Jesus, and numerous other places. Look them up on your own time.

But the simple teaching here is that the saints on earth do not grumble when a sinner repents. **Instead they should and will rejoice when a sinner repents, and ought to welcome him into fellowship and restore him on earth as it is in heaven.**

The reason that the church exists is to bind the unrepentant to their sins; and to forgive the sins of those who do repent. **As public or private of sins you have, when you come to the Lord’s Table, renouncing that sin and seeking forgiveness, you receive it, here and now, and the result of eternal life is immediate and unconditional.** At that moment you are righteous and the angels in heaven and saints on earth rejoice.

Do not, then, be like the Pharisees who resent the salvation of others. If your brother sins rebuke him, but ***if he repents*** forgive him (Luke 17:3). If he comes to you seventy seven times a day and says “I repent” you must forgive him, welcome him, and rejoice with the angels in heaven. For the son of man came not to congratulate the righteous, but to seek and save the lost.