

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost

OLD TESTAMENT – Ezekiel 34:11-24

11 **”For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. ¹⁴ I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice. ¹⁷ ”As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats. ¹⁸ Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet? ¹⁹ Must my flock feed on what you have trampled and drink what you have muddied with your feet? ²⁰ ”Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says to them: See, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. ²¹ Because you shove with flank and shoulder, butting all the weak sheep with your horns until you have driven them away, ²² I will save my flock, and they will no longer be plundered. I will judge between one sheep and another. ²³ I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he will tend them; he will tend them and be their shepherd. ²⁴ I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them. I the LORD have spoken.**

34:11-12 Again, the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ is replete with imagery drawn from these verses (especially Mt 25:32–46; Lk 15:3–7; Jn 10:7–18). Jesus himself is the Shepherd (Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25) who has come for “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Mt 15:24). Moreover, he sends his apostles (and now pastors) as his undershepherds to gather “the lost sheep” (Mt 10:6). That they are both to “tend” (ποιμαίνω) and “feed” (βόσκω) his “lambs” (Jn 21:15–17) has Eucharistic overtones. (CC)

The scattering of the sheep “on a day of clouds and thick darkness” (Ezek 34:12) would apply to the fall of Jerusalem in Ezekiel’s day (Ezek 33:21–22) and to its destruction in A.D. 70, as well as to all the persecutions inflicted on the church (cf. the scattering resulting from the persecution in Acts 8:1; 11:19), but the apocalyptic language especially points to the return of Christ, when his elect shall be gathered from all the earth (Mt 24:29–31). (CC)

34:11 SOVEREIGN LORD – The double name for God here is literally, “Adonai Yahweh” or “my Lord Yahweh, and occurs some 293 times in the OT, mostly in the prophets, and in fact 217 are in Ezekiel. Adonai is always in the plural when used of God (just like the general title Elohim, “God”) and thus witnesses to the triune nature of the Deity. There is sense of “having supreme rank, power, authority; being above all others in character, importance, excellence.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

I myself will search for my sheep. Having dealt with the faithless shepherds (vv. 1–10), the Lord committed himself to shepherd his flock (see Jer 23:3–4). (CSB)

In these verses, the tender, loving care for His miserable fallen creatures demonstrates that the God of the OT is not a wrathful ogre delighting in crushing helpless victims. He is the Father who sent His Son to seek and to save the lost. (TLSB)

In a world where it is increasingly difficult to find Christian leaders in any area of life, it is comforting to know the Lord has promised to get personally involved in caring for the needs of His people when those who should be providing leadership aren't doing their jobs. (PBC) – LUKE 15

Human faithfulness has frustrated His intentions; if it is going to get done. (Concordia Journal – March, 1984)

Through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are sheep of the Good Shepherd (Ps. 23:1). “For He is our God and we are the people of His pasture, the flock under His care” (Ps. 95:7). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:12 AS A SHEPHERD – This refers again to this careful seeking (baqarah, verbal noun) of a shepherd who finds himself “in the midst of” a “scattered flock.” Yahweh has a people. When He comes to be with them, He discovers they are scattered. (Concordia Journal – March, 1984)

I WILL RESCUE THEM – *wehitstalti* implies that they have fallen into danger or under oppression. (Concordia Journal – March, 1984)

from all the places. Babylon was not the only place where the Israelites had gone (see Jer 43:1–7). (CSB)

day of clouds and darkness. The day of the Lord that had come upon Israel when Jerusalem fell in August of 586 B.C. (see 7:7 and note). (CSB)

Times of general distress and persecution; in such times the shepherd should be especially watchful. (ACC)

34:13 *I will bring them out.* The promises of restoration—begun in 11:17 and repeated in 20:34, 41–42; 28:25—find special emphasis in this part (chs. 33–39) of Ezekiel (see 36:24; 37:21; 38:8; 39:27). (CSB)

God promises that He will “bring them out from the nations.” The people of God had been deported to Babylon, where they would live in captivity for 70 years. God’s promise to restore them gives hope. ((Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

The three expressions at the beginning of the verse represent standard prophetic typology, referring to a preliminary “fulfillment” in Israel’s return from the exile, but in total biblical perspective prophesying the ingathering of believers into the “promised land” of the *una sancta* (“one holy catholic and apostolic church” [Nicene Creed]), and even encompassing the final “communion of saints” of all times and places (cf. Ezek 20:34–35, 41–42; 36:24; 37:12, 21). “The mountains of Israel” (which will be featured twice again in the next verse) as the site of the ingathering of Israel represent again one of Ezekiel’s favorite characterizations of the promised land. Here the phrase contrasts with its use in 34:6, where “the mountains” were the site of the people’s previous leaderless dispersal. (CC)

It is interesting to note that although Ezekiel frequently speaks of “the land [אֶרֶץ] of Israel,” he uses suffixed forms, “your/their land/ground,” only in restoration oracles. (CC)

Although generally Ezekiel maintains the ovine and geographical metaphors, with mention of “settlements,” the real referent intrudes briefly: the *people* of the true Israel, the church of both Testaments (Gal 6:16; Ephesians 2). When the return took place, the people would naturally rebuild their cities and villages. Explicit accent on the people will not become dominant until Ezek 34:25–31. (CC)

mountains of Israel.† Compare the tone of 6:3–7 with judgment now past (see v. 12). (CSB)

When I bring back the people from their captivity, I will raise up to them a holy and diligent priesthood, who shall in all places give them sound instruction. But this, and some of the following promises, belong to the Christian Church, as we shall find below. (ACC) NEW ISRAEL – PSALM 23

THEIR OWN LAND – Israel, land flowing with milk and honey, was given to them solely by God’s grace and according to His promises. Our “own land” is heaven, which God will give to us by His grace. We too are foreigners and exiles on earth, for our citizenship is in heaven (Heb 11:14-16). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

PORTION – The tribes of Israel were each given a portion of the Promised Land, though the priestly clan of the Levites was given God Himself, not land, as their inheritance (Dt 10:9; see note, Ps 119:57). Inheritance is an important expression of God’s graciousness in the OT. He

gives lovingly and freely to His people as a father lovingly provides for his children. God's chosen people are His portion and treasured possession (Dt 32:9). (TLSB p. 7)

34:14 *I will tend them.* See Isa 40:11; Jn 10:11. (CSB)

Isaiah 40:11, "He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; [baby sleeps to beat of heart of dad or mom] he gently leads those that have young."

GOOD PASTURE..MOUNTAIN HEIGHTS..GOOD GRAZING LAND..RICH PASTURE – God gives far more than the minimal essentials. The best is yet to come for us sojourners. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:15 **I MYSELF WILL TEND MY SHEEP** – Sheep are not "in good hands" with a hired shepherd (Jn 10:11-13). Our Sovereign King is also our Good Shepherd. He feeds us from His hand just as a shepherd feeds his sheep. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

HAVE THEM LIE DOWN – A shepherd leads the flock to the best areas for grazing and rest. (TLSB)

34:16 **I WILL SEARCH** – That no one was "searching for, seeking" (שׁוֹרֵר, 34:4, 6) the sheep is remedied by the promise that Yahweh himself will do so (שׁוֹרֵר, "seek," in 34:16), as fulfilled in the NT, when "the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Lk 19:10, with ζητέω, which the LXX uses in Ezek 34:4, 16; ἐκζητέω in 34:6). Likewise, Christ himself is the man who "seeks" the one lost sheep in Mt 18:12. (CC)

the sleek and the strong. Those with power who had fattened themselves by oppressing the other "sheep" (see vv. 17–22). – I will destroy those cruel and imperious shepherds who abuse their authority, and tyrannize over the flock. (ACC) – JEWISH LEADERS AND WIDOW'S HOUSES

This verse is a good example of the biblical theme of the Great Reversal, like Lk 1:53: "He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

34:17-22 Not only did the shepherds abuse the flock, but members of the flock abused one another. There were stronger and fatter ones who oppressed and injured the weak and lean ones. God threatens to execute justice on those who prey on the weak. (TLSB)

34:17 **I WILL JUDGE** – A regular duty of animal husbandry, which assures the flock's future and growth, is to compare and distinguish the animals to discern which will be retained in the flock. (TLSB)

rams and goats. People of power and influence who were oppressing poorer Israelites. This prophetic word shows the same concern for social justice found elsewhere in the prophets (see Isa 3:13–15; 5:8; Am 5:12; 6:1–7; Mic 2:1–5). Cf. the treatment of slaves Jeremiah observed (Jer 34:8–11). (CSB)

If there is any part of the chapter where we would love to have more historical context, it is in this verse and through 34:22. It obviously reflects conflicts within the community itself, presumably the one that had been exiled with Ezekiel in 597 B.C., possibly now augmented by some from the fresh wave of exiles that may have joined them after the city's fall in 586. Was there a reluctance by the earlier exiles to accept the impoverished newcomers? But aside from the book of Ezekiel itself, we have no other information about the community's internal affairs. The following verses indicate that the friction was partly between the ruled and the rulers, or at least those who had more power than others. One might speculate that—as the end of the previous chapter might already intimate—some within the community might have actually become repentant believers and were subjected to abuse by the majority, who remained impenitent. However, the book of Ezekiel does not give us clear evidence that any of those exiles who gathered around the prophet were yet believers. Of course, the book of Daniel reveals that some in the earliest group of exiles to Babylon were and remained believers (e.g., Daniel 1; Ezekiel in 14:14, 20 referred to Daniel as having “righteousness”). (CC)

The key word is the verb טַפַּשׁ (34:17, 20, 22), conventionally translated “judge,” together with its cognate noun טַפְשָׁן (“I will shepherd them in *justice*,” 34:16), usually rendered either “judgment” or “justice.” For the verb, I have risked the rendition, “establish the rights.” Talk of “rights” in our culture has become so thoroughly grounded in humanistic and various politically correct ideas that the traditional biblical and Christian use of the word has a difficult time making itself heard. But the Bible has much to say about how we treat one another, both in the church and in the realm of quotidian affairs, theologically founded in the original creation of man and woman in the “image” of the triune God (Gen 1:26–27). Lost in the fall, that image was proleptically restored in the covenant with Israel, climaxing in the “new covenant” in the blood of Christ, who is himself the image of God, and in whom the image is being restored to us. In the light of the explicit Messianism at the end of the chapter (34:23–31), such a horizon cannot be dismissed. Moreover, in Ezek 34:22 Yahweh will “establish rights” (טַפַּשׁ) by “saving” his flock (see the commentary on 34:18–22). (CC)

34:18-22 The animal metaphor is perfectly clear to anyone who has worked around livestock. But, again, the precise occasion or application here eludes us. The general context suggests dysfunction in the community of Israelite exiles. Some of the vocabulary echoes the preexilic situation, for example, the “scattered” of 34:21 harks back to 34:5, and the טַבַּח (“plunder”) of 34:22 uses language for human warfare, as in 34:8. (CC)

Possibly the most heavily laden vocable in 34:22 theologically is יְהוֹשִׁיעֵנִי, “I will save,” expanding on יִצְלָנִי (“I will rescue them”) in 34:12, and, of course, pointing forward to

the ministry of Jesus Christ, whose first advent accomplished our salvation by his cross and whose second advent will usher in our complete rescue from all the effects of sin and evil in this fallen world. Especially in this context, the negative connotation usually associated with “judge” makes that translation for יִבְרָאֵן (“I will establish the rights”) completely misleading. (CC)

One can hardly help but think of the misleadingly entitled book of “Judges,” named after the דִּבְרָאֵן (participle of בְּרָאֵן) therein. In the body of that book, the verb בְּרָאֵן, “judge, administer,” is frequently used for the leaders whom God raises up to organize fractured Israel, turn them from idolatry, and lead the people to renewed faithfulness to their God and to victory over their oppressors. As the narratives illustrate, they are often and rightly referred to also as “savior[s]” who “saved” the people (Hiphil of יָשַׁעַ, e.g., Judg 2:16, 18; 3:9, 15, 31; 6:14–15), since Yahweh himself saved his people through them (Hiphil of יָשַׁעַ, Judg 6:36–37). Because the salvation God accomplished through the judges very much involved theology, we rightly consider them types (prefigurements) of *the* Savior, Jesus Christ. In Ezekiel 34, Yahweh does not speak of undershepherds who minister on his behalf, but only of his own action and that of the one Shepherd. Nevertheless, in the history of salvation, the lines of the OT judges (also of the prophets, priests, and kings) do ultimately converge with that of the Messiah in the subject matter with which the chapter continues and concludes. (CC)

One could also append the various other passages where terms for “save” (or “salvation”) and “judge(ment)” are used side by side describing divine redemption. And then we should recall the crucial role this breakthrough meant in Luther’s understanding of Scripture, which gave rise to the Reformation: the righteousness of God and his activity of judging are revealed not only in his condemnation of the sins of unbelievers, but in his justification of believers in Christ through faith alone (e.g., Rom 1:16–17). (CC)

34:18-19 Certain animals dominate the pasture and the water hole, plying their advantage against the health of the whole flock. Gregory the Great: “The shepherds drink most pure water, when with a right understanding they imbibe the streams of truth. But to foul the same water with their feet is to corrupt the studies of holy meditation by evil living. And verily the sheep drink the water fouled by their feet, when any of those subject to them follow not the words which they hear, but only imitate the bad examples which they see. Thirsting for the things said, but perverted by the works observed, they take in mud with their draughts, as from polluted fountains” (*NPNF* 2 12:2b). (TLSB)

34:18 MUST YOU ALSO MUDDY THE REST WITH YOUR FEET - If we fail to be good shepherds in our families, in our country, in our congregations, we can expect our constituency, our family members and the rest of the congregation to start trampling the pasture, muddying the water so that it is not usable for others. (PBC)

Ye abuse God’s mercies; you consume much upon yourselves, and ye spoil more, on which the poor would have been glad to feed. There are some who would rather give

food to their sporting dogs than to the poor around them, who are ready to starve, and who would be glad of the crumbs that fall from the table of those masters! (ACC) – JEWISH LEADERS WOULD NOT BELIEVE AND ALSO KEPT OTHERS AWAY

Matthew 23:13-15 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men’s faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. ¹⁵“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are.” PART OF SEVEN WOES NEAR END OF JESUS’ MINISTRY

34:20 I MYESLF WILL JUDGE – Cf Mt 25:31–46. (TLSB)

BETWEEN FAT SHEEP...THE LEAN – Between the rich and the poor; those who fare sumptuously every day and those who have not the necessities of life. (ACC)

34:21 SHOVE...BUTT – When leaders abuse their high calling, the people begin to abuse one another. Then the weak are taken advantage of. (PBC)

History judges churches, nations and societies on how they treat the weakest among them.

HORNS – An image of power. Animals with horns are bold; in Israelite thought, a horned animal with its head held high symbolized strength and triumph. (TLSB p. 842)

24:23-24 So much is packed in these two verses that one could almost construct an OT Christology from them. (CC)

The opening verb, “I will raise up” (יָרִימֶנִי, Hiphil of יָרָם), is a standing expression for the establishment of some person in a position through God’s interposition. Moses uses it in Deut 18:15, 18 for God’s promise to establish the Prophet like Moses, that is, Christ (Acts 3:22; 7:37). Elsewhere in the OT it is employed to describe Yahweh’s appointment of all sorts of figures: prophets (Amos 2:11), priests (1 Sam 2:35), and kings (1 Ki 14:14; Jer 30:9). Often it is used for God establishing his gracious covenant. The point here is that this “Shepherd” will not be self-appointed nor selected by popular referendum; his sole source and authority is God. (CC)

Some debate turns about the import of the use of **רֹבֵעַ**, “one Shepherd” (which in other contexts can merely be the sign of an indefinite noun). The antithesis is probably twofold: both the many evil shepherds of the past and especially the two competing kings of the divided empire after the death of Solomon. Only a single ruler under Yahweh could provide the unity and consistency necessary for a united and faithful people. We probably have here an initial statement of the refrain heard in all the prophets who address the topic: the eschatological restoration of the united monarchy. As he often does in Ezekiel, Yahweh here merely suggests or adumbrates a topic he

will later expand much more fully. In this case, the full treatment comes in 37:16–24, where the word **אֶחָד**, “one,” will occur no less than eleven times. (CC)

Of course, Jesus draws on 34:23 when, in Jn 10:16, he refers to other sheep (Gentiles) that he must gather into “one flock” under himself as the “one Shepherd.” The one church spanning both Testaments consists of all believers in Christ, both Jews and Gentiles (e.g., Gal 3:26–29; 6:16; Ephesians 2). All who are under the “one Shepherd” are part of God’s one flock; conversely, all who refuse to submit to this one Shepherd are not. (CC)

“My Servant David” or similar phrases are standing titles of King David. The noun **עַבְדִּי**, “servant,” is so structured in biblical theology that its use can hardly even be surveyed here. It is typically used of those who stood in some official position and especially of those chosen for a special task. In addition to David, phrases indicating that the person was a “servant” of Yahweh are used of Abraham (Gen 26:24; Ps 105:6, 42), Isaac (Gen 24:14), Jacob/Israel (Ezek 28:25; 37:25; 1 Chr 16:13), Moses (often, e.g., Ex 14:31; Josh 18:7), and others, particularly the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. Such phrases are used of David thirty-one times in the OT. They accent not only David’s obedience in contrast to the insubordination of the “shepherds” of Ezek 34:1–10, but also his election (1 Ki 11:34; cf. Is 42:1). (CC)

Our concern here is with the servant David, whose forty-year reign (ca. 1000–960 B.C.) preceded Ezekiel by some four centuries. The basic source of expectations about the “house” of David is Nathan’s oracle to David (2 Samuel 7 || 1 Chronicles 17; cf. Is 9:6–7; Psalm 89). There the promise is made of the perpetuity of David’s dynasty through his Son; it will last “forever” (**לְעוֹלָם** is used repeatedly). Jeremiah summarizes it classically in 33:17, 20–21, 25–26. In the earlier pastoral context of Ezekiel 34, it is perhaps not coincidental that David had been called from the **אֶמְקָר** (“pastoral encampment,” the same term in Ezek 34:14) to be a **מֶלֶךְ** (“ruler”) over Israel (2 Sam 7:8). Samuel avoids the label **מֶלֶךְ**, “king,” as assiduously as Ezekiel does, and for comparable reasons. (CC)

The election and survival of the people of Israel was inextricably bound up with Yahweh’s covenant with David. Inevitably, the fall of Jerusalem and the carrying of the Davidic descendant King Jehoiachin into captivity with Ezekiel had called all this into question. But Yahweh’s promises could not fail, and so one should not be surprised that faithful Israel’s hopes in and after the exile should be formulated in terms of the kingship of David. How significant this hope was after the return is obvious, where **פְּתִילָה**, “Branch” (earlier used by Is 4:2; Jer 23:5; 33:15) has all but become a proper noun for the Messiah (Zech 3:8; 6:12). Even though among first-century Jews this hope became contaminated with dreams of political liberation, its centrality in the NT faith needs no demonstration here. (CC)

If God is to break the power and reign of sin, He must send into this world His own vice-regent, His servant David. This future human-divine Shepherd and Prince will not destroy the sheep but feed them with bread from heaven (Jn 6:32–40). The brilliance of divine revelation shines into

coming centuries. Ezekiel sees this transformation from doom to delight in the perspective of prophetic vision. Past, present, and future merge into a single dimension of timeless fact. The old covenant blends into the new covenant. (TLSB)

34:23 *my servant David*.† A ruler like David and from his line (see Ps 89:4, 20, 29; Jer 23:5–6). Under great David’s greater Son there would be one flock, one Shepherd who will feed them with the bread from heaven (Jn 6:32–40; 10:16). (CSB)

The 12 tribes of Jacob were divided into two kingdoms after Solomon’s death. Under great David’s greater Son, there will be one flock, one shepherd. (TLSB)

34:24 MY SERVANT – This is the same term used in Isaiah of the Suffering Servant (Is. 42:1; 53:1 etc.). He will bestow upon His blood-bought people all the promised covenant blessings in richest measure. These blessings – the forgiveness of sins, life and salvation – are already ours by faith. We will experience their fullness in heaven. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

WILL BE PRINCE – This literally means “one lifted up,” a leader or ruler. In the same eschatological vision of Ezekiel 40-48, this same Hebrew term will be used of the Prince over the people in the eternal kingdom (Ez 45:7, 17, 22; 46:2, 4, 8, 10, 12, 16-18; 48:21-22). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 4)

No one will occupy the throne after Him, for He will be the Prince forever (37:25). Cf 2Sm 7:11–16; Is 9:5–6; 11:1–2; Jer 30:9. For Jesus’ human ancestry from David’s royal house. (TLSB)

EPISTLE –1Timothy 1:12-17

12 I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. ¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

1:12 I THANK GOD WHO HAS GIVEN ME STRENGTH – Paul knows who he was which comes out in verse 13 and therefore gives God all the credit for anything he is able to accomplish. Christ enabled Paul, particularly in the act of his call, to be an apostle.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10, ⁹ For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of

God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.”

Galatians 1:15-17, “¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from birth ^a and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.”

Ephesians 3:7-8, “⁷ I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God’s grace given me through the working of his power. ⁸ Although I am less than the least of all God’s people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”

judged me faithful. The Lord Jesus considered Paul faithful even before Paul was able to demonstrate his faithfulness as a minister of the Gospel. Cf Ac 9:15–16. (TLSB)

service. As an apostle. (TLSB)

1:13 *a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.* See Ac 9:1; 22:4–5, 19; 26:10–11. (CSB)

Paul’s own apostolic ministry is the clearest Gospel of divine mercy written into the life of undeserving mankind.

Before his conversion, Paul (then known as Saul) had actively persecuted the followers of Jesus (Ac 7:58–8:3). Yet, in his zeal to ravage the Church, Paul was, in fact, persecuting the Lord Jesus Himself (Ac 9:4–5). (TLSB)

ACTED IN IGNORANCE – This did not make him guiltless, of course, but he had not placed himself outside the sphere of Jesus’ prayer from the cross (“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” – Luke 23:34) by deliberate rejection of the truth, as false teachers do.

Paul was the passive recipient of mercy from the Lord, whose mercy is always undeserved and unearned—it can be received only as a gift. Paul’s admission that he acted ignorantly is not offered as an excuse for his sin. It shows, rather, that he did not willfully reject the Savior because he was ignorant that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. (TLSB)

1:14 **GRACE OF OUR LORD WAS Poured OUT** – Mercy is equated with grace. God’s grace is abundant. See his grace in Christ Jesus. The abundant grace of God in Christ hinges on his coming into the world to save sinners.

Paul’s heart was changed by God’s overflowing grace. *grace.* God’s undeserved favor shown to the guilty sinner. *overflowed.* Though he regarded himself as the foremost of sinners, the Lord’s grace for Paul was poured out in abundance. (TLSB)

1:15 *Here is a trustworthy saying.* A clause found nowhere else in the NT but used five times in the Pastorals (here; 3:1; 4:9; 2Ti 2:11; Tit 3:8) to identify a key saying. (CSB)

Perhaps a restatement of what Jesus proclaimed concerning Himself in the Gospels (cf Lk 19:10). (TLSB)

came into the world. At His incarnation, Christ entered the realm in which human beings live and sin (Php 2:5–8). (TLSB)

OF WHOM I AM THE WORST – Paul calls himself the chief of sinners. We know that we are not immune to the vile virus ourselves. We, too, are lost and condemned sinners. We are seriously bound for Satan’s fire.

Paul led persecution against the Lord and His followers. The present tense of the verb indicates that Paul’s self-designation remains valid, even though he has been fully absolved and saved by Christ Jesus. Christians do not cease to sin until the life of the world to come. In this life, we remain saints (people made holy through faith in Jesus) and sinners. (TLSB)

1:16 *mercy for this reason.* In v 13b, Paul describes God’s mercy in terms of what God did for him; in v 16, that same mercy is described in terms of the example it set for others. (TLSB)

DISPLAY HIS UNLIMITED PATIENCE – Christ showed his patience and mercy over sin in Paul for the sake of others who would come to faith. There’s a pattern to behold! God’s mercy meets of misery; Christ comes to save. God hid his face from our sins in Christ, and through Christ God blotted out all our iniquities. In other words, God pursues us with his mercy. So eager is God to catch up to us with his blessings that he ran out of breath doing it. He became a breathless, lifeless body on a cross so that we run-away people might have a clean slate and come back home with the Father who chased us in his Son.

When God delays judgment against sin, this patience is an occasion for repentance and salvation (2Pt 3:9, 15). (TLSB)

example. God would also graciously deal with other sinners who would repent and believe in the future. (TLSB)

1:17 *King of ages.* The past, present, and future are under His control. (TLSB)

immortal. Immune to corruption and decay. (TLSB)

invisible. Jesus says that God is “spirit” (Jn 4:24). He is the Maker “of all things visible and invisible” (Nicene Creed). (TLSB)

only God. Even as Christians confess the divinity of Jesus as the Son of God, they worship one God, the Holy Trinity (Rm 3:29–30; 1Co 8:4–6; 1Tm 2:5). (TLSB)

GOSPEL – Luke 15:1-10

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³ Then 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? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and 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.

Luke 15 is a high point in the travel narrative and in the entire gospel. Called “The Gospel of the Outcast” and the “The Gospel for the Outcast,” Luke 15 “is so distinctive of the Lucan portrait of Jesus” as to be called “The Heart of the Third Gospel.” It is closely connected to the table talk and discourse on discipleship in Luke 14; Jesus is looking for those who have ears to hear his catechesis (14:35). The entirety of chapter 15 both is directed at the Pharisees and is also a fundamental part of the catechesis for the disciples and the crowds (and the tax collectors and sinners). The structure of the chapter is simple: an introduction (15:1–3) and three parables, one about a lost sheep (15:4–7), one about a lost coin (15:8–10), and one about a lost son (15:11–32). (CC p. 586)

Luke’s introduction to these three parables signals to his hearer that this chapter must be heard in view of what Jesus has been teaching in the previous two chapters. Table fellowship language dominates both Luke 13 and 14. Table fellowship continues to be the context here in Luke 15. And because God’s table fellowship is at issue, the eschatological themes of end-time banquet and communion or rejection begun in Luke 13 and 14 also continue to be in the picture here. (CC p. 586)

Luke’s framework is simple. In fact, he seems unconcerned with time or place and concerned only with persons.

From 13:31–35 to the moment when Jesus reaches Jerusalem, time seems to be an insignificant factor for Luke. There are no more Sabbath references or any other time markers. The last reference to place was in the previous passage where Jesus is clearly journeying to his Jerusalem destiny (14:25). The teachings in Luke 14–16 are given while on the way to Jerusalem. (See comments at 13:31–35 about the time and locale for Jesus’ teaching from 13:32 to 19:27.) (CC p. 586)

It is important that these parables be heard as spoken by Jesus as he journeys swiftly to his destination in Jerusalem and his exodus (9:31) at Calvary. (CC p. 586)

Both the tax collectors/sinners and the Pharisees/scribes heard these three parables. Jesus wants each group to hear these parables and see themselves in them, for the parables illustrate that the nature of the kingdom is joyous feasting with God. The illustration culminates in the parable of the two sons, the prodigal son and his elder brother, where the kingdom is a feast for sinners prepared by the Father himself. The elder son draws near (ἤγγισεν; 15:25) and hears the music and dancing of the messianic feast prepared for the prodigal son who has repented. The elder brother is not like the sinners and tax collectors but like the Pharisees, who do not recognize the kingdom when they see it. In both cases, ἐγγίζω, “draw near,” is used for those who approach the kingdom that has come in Jesus: in 15:2, the tax collectors and sinners draw near to Jesus, who receives them, eats with them, and tells them a parable about rejoicing at the eschatological feast; in 15:25, the brother of the prodigal son draws near to the feast only to be scandalized and to reject the eschatological meal, joy, and witness of his father—a reaction similar to the Pharisees’ rejection of Jesus. Thus Jesus addresses Pharisees/scribes and tax collectors/sinners simultaneously. His comforting revelation of the way of the kingdom is also a loving admonition to the scandalized to join the celebration through repentance. It is necessary correctly to discern the addressees in order to understand properly the point revealed. (CC pp. 587-588)

Three parables about finding what was lost illustrate human weakness and the strength of God’s care. (TLSB)

15:1 *tax collectors and “sinners.”* See notes on 3:12 (CSB)

(Taxes were collected for the Roman government by Jewish agents, who were especially detested for helping the pagan conqueror and for frequently defrauding their own people); Mk 2:15 (Sinners were notoriously evil people as well as those who either refused or lacked the time to follow the Mosaic law as interpreted by the teachers of the law. The term was commonly used to tax collectors, adulterers, robbers and the like).

These were despised and cast out of the synagogues by the church leaders of their time. They were also not permitted to associate on a plane of equality with the Jews in good standing. (Kretzmann)

There were ranks among the people of that day: (Stuenkel)

- Priests and Sadducees
- Scribes and Pharisees
- Rural People
- Publicans & Sinners
- Slaves

WERE GATHERING – eggisontes – They kept coming. It was as though there was a sucking power that Jesus had. – Magnet & filings – Sun/wind – Honey/vinegar – Gospel

ἐγγίζοντες—Luke uses ἐγγίζω eighteen times in his gospel and six times in Acts. In comparison, Matthew has seven occurrences, Mark three, and John none. This word often carries with it an eschatological dimension (cf. H. Preisker, ἐγγύς, TDNT 2:331), and in Luke it emphasizes the nearness (secret presence) of the kingdom in Jesus, revealed in miracles or table fellowship. (Most significant are Lk 7:12; 10:9, 11; 15:1; 18:35, 40; 21:8, 20, 28, 30, 31; 24:15, 28; see also Lk 12:33; 15:25; 19:11, 29, 37, 41; 22:1, 47) See A. A. Just Jr., *The Ongoing Feast*, 60–63, 125, 220–21. In Acts, an eschatological connection is present in ἐγγύς (Acts 1:12) and ἐγγίζω (Acts 7:17; 9:3; 22:6). Compare the phrase “The kingdom of God/of heaven has come near” (Mt 3:2; etc.), which uses the same verb. (CC p. 584)

TO HEAR HIM – ἀκούειν—This is an infinitive of purpose, “in order to hear him.” On ἀκούω as a technical term for catechumens, see comments at 5:1; the Sermon on the Plain (6:27, 47, 49); the parable of the sower (8:8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18); and Jesus’ discussion of the new kinship (8:21). The tax collectors and sinners wanted to become hearers of the Word. (CC p. 584)

But Luke is most certainly concerned about the persons, and for these parables the audience is critical. Luke begins by telling us that the tax collectors and sinners are drawing near (ἐγγίζοντες; 15:1). The hearer would understand from Luke’s gospel that these are “the poor, the disabled, the lame, the blind” (14:13, 21). The reason the tax collectors and sinners come to Jesus is “in order to hear him” (15:1), a response to Jesus’ final admonition at the end of the previous chapter: “The one having ears to hear, let him hear” (14:35). (CC p. 587)

As was noted in commenting on the Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6, hearers of the Word are catechumens. These tax collectors/sinners want to become Jesus’ catechumens—his disciples, or learners of the Word. This certainly is a sign of their repentance, a major theme of the next three parables. (CC p. 587)

15:2 *muttered*. Complained among themselves, but not openly. (CSB)

It meant that they started a dirty rumor about Jesus. “He is bringing disgrace upon the whole business of Rabbinic work.” (Stuenkel)

διεγόγγυζον—The imperfect suggests customary, continuous action, i.e., they began to grumble again, as was their wont. The Pharisees grumble also at 5:30 in reaction to Jesus’ eating with Levi and in 19:7 when Jesus stays at the home of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector. (See A. A. Just Jr., *The Ongoing Feast*, 134.) Note also the assonance in ἐγγίζοντες ... διεγόγγυζον. (CC pp. 584-585)

Luke continues by introducing the Pharisees and scribes who are “grumbling” that “this man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (15:2), summing up Jesus’ table fellowship ministry. This “grumbling” imitates the behavior of the Israelites in the desert. They saw the signs of God’s presence but did not believe. (E.g., Ex 15:24; 16:2, 7–8; 17:3; Num 11:1; 14:2, 27, 29, 36; 16:11, 41; 17:5; Deut 1:27; cf. 1 Cor 10:10) Scribes are leaders

of the Pharisees, and the Pharisaic party may be beginning to formulate charges against Jesus that would involve his table fellowship with sinners. (CC p.587)

See the excursus “The Opponents of Jesus in Luke.” Table fellowship with sinners was a serious offense against the Pharisees’ table fellowship laws, and they are certainly aware from Jesus’ previous behavior at the table that his view of table fellowship is radically different from theirs (see the excursus “Jesus’ Table Fellowship”). (CC p. 587)

eats with them. More than simple association, eating with a person indicated acceptance and recognition (cf. Ac 11:3; 1 Co 5:11; Gal 2:12). (CSB)

προσδέχεται καὶ συνεσθίει—These two present tense verbs indicate that Jesus’ activity is ongoing and habitual, i.e., it is his pattern to welcome sinners and eat with them. See 5:30 and comments at 7:34 on the penalty Jesus could receive for being a friend of tax collectors and sinners according to Deut 21:22–23. (CC p. 585)

15:3-7 The lost sheep represents the sinner, while God, esp the Son, is the shepherd (cf Ps 23; Is 40:11). The found sheep is every Christian, rescued and delivered by God. The neighbors are the saints and angels who rejoice together. (TLSB)

15:3 *this parable.* Jesus responded with a story that contrasted the love of God with the exclusiveness of the Pharisees. (CSB)

Ἔπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτοὺς τὴν παραβολὴν ταύτην λέγων—This introduction is similar to that of the parable in Lk 5:36, which also has similar thematic components (see comments below). The antecedent here for αὐτοὺς is both the tax collectors/sinners and the Pharisees/scribes. (CC p. 585)

15:4 ONE OF YOU – The shepherds were referred to in this verse were those people the Pharisees would hire but they would not consider being a shepherd. They were above that. (Stuenkel)

Listening to Jesus, the tax collectors/sinners and (especially) the Pharisees/scribes would feel invited to imagine that they are like a shepherd who has lost a sheep. As the Pharisees (in particular) hear this parable, they might be offended by being referred to as “shepherds” and also by being accused of “losing” one of those for whom they are responsible.

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 147, notes that even though shepherds are highly esteemed figures in the OT (e.g., Psalm 23, Ezekiel 34), they engaged in a despised trade at the time of Jesus and were considered unclean and sinners (part of the *am—ha’arets*, the “people of the land,” the commoners). He also points out that the shepherd “lost” the sheep, i.e., that ἀπολέσας, “having lost” (15:4), is (surprisingly?) an *active* aorist participle, not a passive one, suggesting that the shepherd is responsible for the loss of the sheep (p. 149). (CC p. 588)

This reiterates what Jesus has already accused them of in his woes and his final accusation against them: “Woe to you lawyers, because you took away the key of knowledge; you yourselves did not enter in, and those entering in you prevented” (11:52; cf. “scribes and Pharisees” in 11:53). (CC p. 588)

the lost sheep. The shepherd theme was familiar from Ps 23; Isa 40:11; Eze 34:11–16. (CSB)

In their office as religious leaders, “shepherds” of the people, the Pharisees and scribes might indeed hear Jesus calling them to imitate him, that is, to be shepherds who journey to seek the lost one. That is what Jesus is doing and that is what they grumble at; it is the nub of the conflict. And so the shepherd’s work to journey, seek, rescue, and restore the lost sheep is given careful description and a central position. (CC pp. 588-589)

IN OPEN COUNTRY – Their normal pasture. The emphasis is not on neglecting the flock, but on seeking the lost. (A shepherd typically watched 3-40 sheep, so Jesus’ account likely implies the presence of one or two helpers. (TLSB)

ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ—On the desert, see comments at 4:1. This is the last occurrence of ἔρημος in Luke. (It is in Lk 1:80; 3:2, 4; 4:1, 42; 5:16; 7:24; 8:29; 9:12) (R. Stein, *Luke*, 403, notes that “most shepherding was done on ‘desert mountains’ east of Bethlehem.”) (CC p. 585)

The sheep is lost in the wilderness. Normal Palestinian practice would include more than one shepherd to watch the sheep, and if one were lost *while they are in the wilderness*, one shepherd would go out to look for the lost sheep and the other(s) would take care of the ninety-nine. They would not be abandoned but would be watched over by others. (CC p. 589)

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 149, suggests that these are “peasant” shepherds who would bring the sheep back to the village at night, and not “roving tribesman” who would keep their flocks in the field at night. (CC p. 589)

GO AFTER THE LOST SHEEP – This meant going into ravines in stormy weather and taking risks. (Stuenkel)

So, then, the shepherd responsible for finding the lost sheep goes out into the wilderness and finds it huddled and incapable of movement. (CC p. 589)

K. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 148, cites C. Stuhlmüller, “The Gospel according to Luke,” *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. R. Brown, J. Fitzmyer, and R. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1971) 148: “A lost sheep will lie down helplessly and refuse to budge. The shepherd is forced to carry it over a long distance.” (CC p. 589)

The following excerpts from the July 31, 1985 Ft. Wayne News-Sentinel illustrate well what can go into a search. “Out of desperation, Pamela and Neal Jordon and five of their children went to a carnival Friday. The purpose of their visit was anything but fun. Someone called the police and said ‘they though they saw Crissie with the carnival when it left Ft. Wayne’...Crystal Jordon, 16, has been missing since July 17...The Jordans have seven children, ages 3 to 18...‘We went up there out of desperation,’ said Mrs. Jordon of her trip to Goshen. ‘We’re pretty desperate to hear from her; we’re scared to death. When it rained the other night, all I could think about was how I hoped she wasn’t out there. I hoped she was staying dry...Just not knowing where she’s at, not knowing if she’s okay...is she sick? Is she hungry? Is she crying? This is what eats at me.’”(Note – Crystal was found save and sound)

15:5 PUTS ON SHOULDERS – At that time the sheep’s feet were tied together in front of the shepherd’s neck. The bottom of the sheep was against the back of the shepherd’s neck. This was done because it was presumed that the sheep was exhausted and so the only way the sheep could get lost was if the shepherd got lost. (Stuenkel)

The lost sheep is carried home in safety with triumph and celebration. Shepherds often brought the flock home to the village at the end of the day, though not always (cf 2:8). (TLSB)

He must carry it back to the village, yet he rejoices. This simple description of the shepherd hoisting the sheep onto his shoulders, rejoicing as he journeys back to the village, is more than a demonstration of Luke’s attention to detail and a display of human pathos. *This is a core description of the Good Shepherd and is a major theme of Luke 15*, as K. Bailey rightly points out:

In this parable Jesus is defending his welcome of sinners. This welcome involves restoration to a community. The wandering sheep must be brought back to the fold now gathered in the village. This, for any shepherd, has a price. The search has its price but so does the act of restoration. In this theme of the burden of restoration there are clear Christological implications which point in the direction of the passion. The shepherd must carry on his shoulders the burden of the lost sheep, a detail that is specifically mentioned. Without the shouldering of this burden there is no restoration. This task the shepherd accepts with joy. (CC p. 588)

Note also the parallel with Is 40:10–11, where God is portrayed as a shepherd carrying his sheep. (CC p. 589)

15:6 CALLED TOGETHER...FRIENDS/NEIGHBORS – τούς φίλους καὶ τοὺς γείτονας— This is repeated in 15:9 and recalls 14:12. (CC p. 585)

REJOICE WITH ME – συγχαρήτέ μοι—This imperative is repeated at 15:9, the only two imperatives in this pericope. It announces the main theme of this entire chapter, the theme of joy, that climaxes at 15:23–24, 32. (CC p. 585)

Climax of the story (cf Rv 19:7). (TLSB)

Restoration brings joy to the shepherd in finding the sheep, and joy to the village when the shepherd returns with the sheep. This is why joy is repeated twice around the center of restoration to the house where the community lives. Joy is generally shared by a community in first-century Palestine. And in that culture joy would be shared at a meal in fellowship around a table. The table fellowship context of this entire section strongly suggests that the hearers would envision the shepherd/woman inviting friends and neighbors into his/her home to rejoice *over a meal*. (CC pp. 589-590)

As D. Moessner, *Lord of the Banquet*, 159, points out:

In both instances Jesus does not allow the point to escape his Pharisees-scribes audience: *He is like the shepherd and the woman by seeking out the lost and separated folk from society and bringing them to the table fellowship of repentant sinners (15:7, 10)*. With the authority to voice how God (“heaven”/“angels,” vv. 7, 10) views “sinners,” Jesus etches an impression of his own sending to invite and receive sinners who repent. We thus have the same mission portrayed as that of the messengers and the Seventy (-two) in 9:52–56 and 10:1–24, with the difference that Jesus as host summons his guests not to his own but to his Father’s “house” of the Kingdom of God (emphasis added). (CC p. 590)

I HAVE FOUND MY LOST SHEEP – εὑρον ... τὸ ἀπολωλός—Connected to the theme of rejoicing is the complementary theme of losing and finding (cf. 15:9, 24, 32). (CC p. 585)

15:7 I TELL YOU – On λέγω ὑμῖν, see comments at 4:24. This expression occurs twice in this passage (15:10). It is also used at 13:35 and 14:24, tying these three chapters together. (cc P. 585)

rejoicing in heaven. God’s concern and joy at the sinner’s repentance are set in stark contrast to the attitude of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law (v. 2). (CSB)

The rejoicing in heaven is over those whom the shepherd has found. (TLSB)

ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ—This is a circumlocution for God and/or those (angels) who are in God’s presence (15:10). (CC p. 585)

This shared joy of the community at the restoration of a lost sheep becomes the chief point of Jesus’ application of the parable, introduced by the important phrase “I say to you” (15:7). The community of joy that Jesus has in mind is the earthly and now heavenly community that exists through him and the coming of his kingdom. The joy is over a sinner who repents. That is what his ministry has been about: calling tax collectors and sinners to repentance. Jesus stated this as the goal of his ministry at the very beginning, while at table with Levi the tax collector, when he said, “I have not come to call righteous, but sinners to repentance” (5:32). And he will reiterate it at the end of his ministry, entering the home of Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, when “the lost”

become the declared goal of his ministry: “For the Son of Man came in order to seek and to save the lost” (τὸ ἀπολωλός; 19:10). Repentance here is not like that of the Pharisees or of the rabbis at the time of Jesus but is the repentance that John the Baptist preached and Jesus continued to call for in his ministry:

For first-century Judaism repentance was a way of bringing in the kingdom. In the preaching of Jesus repentance was a response to the kingdom already come. ... The sheep does nothing to prompt the shepherd to begin his search except to become lost. In the parable the shepherd finds the sheep. Then, in the conclusion to the parable, there is reported joy over “one sinner who *repents*.” Here “being found” is equated with “repentance.” Thus the parable of the Lost Sheep sets out a radically new understanding of the nature of repentance. (CC p. 590)

righteous ... do not need to repent. Probably irony: those who think they are righteous (such as the Pharisees and the teachers of the law) and feel no need to repent. (CSB)

μετανοοῦντι ... μετανοίας—On repentance in Luke-Acts, see comments at 3:1–20 and 5:32. (CC p. 585)

But what of the ninety-nine? How would the Pharisees interpret this? Would they now be brought to see themselves not as the shepherd, but as the ninety-nine, that is, the “self-righteous” who claim that they “have no need of repentance” (assuming that those words of Jesus in 15:7 are to be taken ironically)? Are they still in the wilderness, or have they too returned to the village to join in the festive meal of rejoicing over the recovery of the lost sheep? The Pharisees know that these parables are directed against them. They know that, in Jesus’ view, all need to repent, so that there is no such thing as people who have no need for repentance. The Pharisees know that they have rejected John’s call for repentance and so have also rejected God’s plan of salvation in John and Jesus (cf. 7:29–35). As they listen carefully to the parable, they are never told whether the ninety-nine are still in the wilderness or have returned to the village. Jesus leaves it up in the air because these parables are his call to them to repentance. Are they going to be rescued by Jesus and rejoice with tax collectors? If so, they should stop grumbling, repent, be brought to the village, and join the feast with Jesus. If not, they will be left in the wilderness, in need of a shepherd to find them and bring them to the feast. The remaining ministry of Jesus, and the mission of the church, is to continue to call—and carry—the ninety-nine in from the wilderness home to the eschatological feast of Jesus. (CC pp. 590-591)

Luther says our entire life must be a continuous repentance. This was probably another lesson for the religious leaders.

The self-righteous imagine that they need no repentance. Before we are found by the Gospel, the Law must show we are hopelessly lost. (TLSB)

15:1–7 In the first of three similar parables, Jesus uses the devotion of a shepherd to illustrate God’s willingness to find the wayward sinner. God does not abandon us to our foolishness but

seeks us out, calling us to repentance and to faith in the Gospel. • Bring us home, dear Lord, and let there be joy in heaven. Grant us daily repentance. Amen. (TLSB)

The Parable of the Lost Coin

8 “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

15:8-10 In the second parable, the repentant sinner is like a coin. Unlike the wandering sheep, the coin is inanimate, emphasizing its complete helplessness. (TLSB)

The parable of the lost coin emphasizes the same themes as the parable of the lost sheep. It has a parallel structure but fewer details. Its inclusion reflects Jesus’ custom, preserved especially in Luke, of telling two complementary accounts, one featuring action by a man and one by a woman (cf. 13:18–21). The joyful bearing of the burden of restoration is not featured, but again there is the losing, the seeking, the finding, and the community rejoicing, which context and custom suggest includes a festive meal. By repeating these themes, Jesus reiterates for the Pharisees the very essence of his ministry and prepares them for the fullest treatment of these themes in the parable of the prodigal son. (CC p. 591)

15:8 OR – ἢ—The “or” connects the two parables as a pair, one with a man as the main character, the other with a woman. See also the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven in 13:18–21. (CC p. 585)

ten silver coins. See NIV text note. A *drachma* was a Greek coin approximately equivalent to the Roman denarius, worth about an average day’s wages (Mt 20:2). (CSB)

Perhaps a collection of coins or bits of silver, worn as a headdress, brought into the marriage as the woman’s dowry and meant to sustain the family in times of want. The value of such a coin, a day’s wages, was once equivalent to the price of a sheep. (TLSB)

δραχμάς—This is the only place in the NT where “drachma” occurs. A drachma is a Greek coin, equivalent to a Roman denarius, estimated to be worth about a day’s wage. Ten drachmas would be the life savings of a family, enough to see them through a period when no work could be found. Could this coin be part of her dowry? (Cf. J. Jeremias, *Parables*, 133.) (CC p. 585)

A Greek drachma was worth about .17 or about one day’s wages. This was usually her only financial security. If divorced, it was all she had. Women often carried their coins in a tightly knotted rag. (Stuenkel)

LIGHT A LAMP – οὐχὶ ἄπτει λύχνον—This allusion to the lamp recalls Jesus' catechetical teaching in chapters 8 and 11. (See the parable in 8:16–18; 11:33–36.) A typical Mediterranean house had few windows to allow natural light, so a lamp would be necessary for a thorough search. (CC p. 585)

search carefully. Near Eastern houses frequently had no windows and only earthen floors, making the search for a single coin difficult. (CSB)

ζητεῖ—This is another pointer by Jesus to his previous catechetical teaching; see 11:9–10 and 12:31. (CC p. 585)

There may be one unique contribution that this second parable makes to the themes of Luke 15. Is it possible that the woman with the lamp searching her house for the lost coin is a symbol of the church? The early church gathered together for worship and catechesis in house churches. Illumination comes from the lamp through the Word of God (Ps 119:105), which the church brings to those who are assembled for worship in order to catechize them. The coin they have lost could represent the offering that must be paid for the atonement of sins (Ex 30:16). Christ is that offering, that coin. The only way that coin is found is through catechesis and Baptism, both of which take place in the house church. Thus, taking the two parables together, Jesus the shepherd restores the sheep back to the fold, where there is rejoicing that the lost sheep has been found. But after restoration to the church has taken place, the church must continue to catechize so that Christ continues to be found in the ongoing life of the church. (CC p. 591)

Losing something in the house was not as simple as it sounds. House of that time had mud floor, some had grass or reeds on the floor. They had high and small windows for security's sake. Frequently animals of some sort were also kept in the house. (Stuenkel)

A typical house was dark even in daytime, having few or no windows. Christ, the light of the world, seeks out the lost. (TLSB)

15:10 IN THE PRESENCE OF ANGELS – ἐνώπιον τῶν ἀγγέλων τοῦ θεοῦ—This is also a circumlocution for “in God's presence.” (CC p. 585)

The community of joy that Jesus has in mind is the earthly and now heavenly community that exists through him and the coming of his kingdom. The joy is over a sinner who repents. (CC)

Notice it does not speak of rejoicing by the angels but in the presence of angels. Who is doing this rejoicing in Heaven? I believe it logically includes not only God but also the saints in Heaven, who would so deeply appreciate the wonder of human conversion – especially the conversion of those they knew and loved on Earth. If they rejoice over conversions happening on Earth, then obviously they must be aware of what is happening on Earth – and not just generally, but specifically, down to the details of individuals coming to faith in Christ. (Heaven – Alcorn p. 71)

15:8–10 The unrepentant sinner is like a coin lost in the darkness. Once lost, we have no more ability to find the Lord than the coin has to find its owner. Yet, the good news of Christ gives “light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (1:79). • Thank You, merciful Lord, for seeking us when we had no power to seek You. Amen. (TLSB)