

Kingdom Pursuit

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 June 2025

Preacher: Elliott Lytle

[0 : 00] All right, good morning, everybody. Hope you're doing well. Good to see you again. Happy Father's Day. My name is Elliot, one of the pastors here. So good to be with you here at City Grace Church today.

So as Jesse said, we're kind of in the middle of a series where we're taking some time to examine the parables of Jesus, these stories that he told to the people who came near to him that were intended to reveal to them something about God and his kingdom that might be otherwise hard to see.

And to this point, we've looked at parables that have shown us something about how the kingdom grows and what the kingdom is worth. And last week, Jesse did such a good job walking us through a parable that taught us about what kingdom mercy and forgiveness looked like.

You know you're still thinking about that right now, who you should forgive. So, you know, we've done a lot of that kind of stuff. And today, we're actually going to look at a series of what is actually three back-to-back parables that Jesus tells in the same passage.

And it's in response to a common complaint that the religious leaders, the kind of self-declared righteous people of Jesus' day, had about him.

[1 : 11] It was actually a complaint they made in more than one instance. And we're actually going to start today just kind of reading that background as context because that setting is really important for the parables that he tells.

So, starting off in Luke chapter 15, verse 1, it gives us the backdrop. And it says this, Now, that accusation that Jesus hangs out with sinners and has meals with sinners and indeed, if you would, is a friend of sinners, is one that the Pharisees make on more than one occasion in the Gospels. You see, to them, a righteous community, by definition, meant that only righteous people could be in it. Or at least righteous people as they understood righteousness.

And what Jesus is doing to them by inviting people into it, who, by the way, have very public sins, right? Like, it calls out tax collectors. People who were openly collaborating with the Romans to oppress the Jewish people.

Everyone knew who they were. Prostitutes. Everyone knows what they do for a living. Like, these are very public sins. And to them, when Jesus invited them in and ate with them and fellowshiped with them, he was doing something that was really shameful.

[2 : 48] And indeed, I would argue that phrase, which, if you'll notice, we actually use in our liturgy sometimes, right? We say Jesus is the friend of sinners. And I would argue, in some ways, it's just as polarizing today as it would have been then.

Because on one hand, I think that title for Jesus makes people uncomfortable because, well, what are we trying to say? That Jesus is comfortable with sin?

Like, that sin is really no big deal and it should never, ever separate people? But you can't do any reading of Scripture and come to that conclusion.

I mean, I would say that God's anger, in fact, to use a biblical word, His wrath against sin because of how it destroys what is beautiful and because how it destroys people made in His image.

Like, that anger and wrath that you see in the Bible is nothing short of intense. And frankly, intense in a way that probably offends our modern sensibilities and makes us uncomfortable.

[3 : 56] So whatever friend of sinners means, it can't mean that God just accepts sin. But Jesus is also unequivocally receiving in and welcoming sinners, which means, at the very least, sinners liked being around Him.

Like, He is eating and drinking and fellowshiping with them and He is building a community that doesn't look like what the religious leaders presumed it would.

So what is Jesus up to here? Like, what is He trying to accomplish? It was actually a similar instance to this. It's not the exact same story as this one, but it's a place where the Pharisees make that similar accusation of Him.

And in this case, He actually gives them not a parable, but a pretty straightforward answer. In Matthew chapter 9, verse 10, and bear in mind, this verse we're going to read happens right after Jesus calls Matthew, the tax collector sinner, to be one of His followers.

And so they're at the house with all of Matthew's, you know, tax collector friends. And it says, And as Jesus reclined at the table, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and His disciples.

[5 : 21] And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? But when Jesus heard it, He said, Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

So Jesus tells them, I have a purpose. If I'm here to heal what is broken, and I am here to seek what is lost, then I have to go to where the sick people are.

If I'm going to find what is lost, I'm going to have to pursue it. And because of that, I think that's why in this instance, we're going to read in Luke, instead of giving them a blunt response, in this instance, Jesus tells them this series of parables to try to teach them something about what kingdom pursuit looks like.

And so that's where we'll pick back up the text in Luke chapter 15, verse 3. So they complain about Jesus hanging out with tax collectors and sinners.

And then it says this, 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 ninety-nine in open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

[6 : 45] And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found the sheep that was lost.

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses a coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says, Rejoice with me, for I found the coin that I'd lost. Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

This is God's word to us. Now, before we unpack these two stories today, I want to start with sort of a thesis I'm going to propose as to what I think both of these stories actually teach us that I kind of hope becomes more and more clear as we go through the sermon today.

And that big idea is really just this. Kingdom love doesn't coerce, manipulate, or violate. It pursues.

[8 : 05] You know, I think one of the, one of the most common questions that both skeptics and believers alike, if they're honest, sometimes have about serving a God that you can't see and you can't hear and you can't touch, is, you know, if God is really there, like if He's really there, then why doesn't He just show up?

Like, if God wants me to believe in Him, why doesn't He just reveal Himself in an unambiguous way? Like, show up in this room and blow us all away.

make it abundantly clear that He exists and He is the glorious one to be worshipped. Now, there's obviously a lot behind a question like that and, you know, there are a lot of ways you can kind of approach it intellectually and philosophically that I think can be helpful that you can't unpack in one sermon and I do think too, let's just say, it's a real and visceral question that I don't think you should just run past.

Like, it's okay to not feel satisfied with like kind of a glib or simple answer to that. It's something you have to wrestle with. But I do think there's a reality here in this picture that's given of God's love and both the why and the how that He pursues people that's really helpful.

Years ago, I heard a pastor tell a story of a conversation he had with a man who was recounting his experiences as a prisoner of war, like a POW.

[9 : 49] And he said, you know, one of the things that that man recounted to him is that until you've been in something like that, like, you're really not aware how much you can make a person do by the application of power and pain and torture.

Like, you can make a person do a lot of stuff they never thought they would do. Like, you can make people say things they never thought they would say. You can make people eat things that are gross that they never thought they'd put in their mouth.

You can make people betray their friends. You can make people deny their God. But he said, you know, the one thing that they couldn't do, like, the one thing that you can never do through the application of power is to make someone love you.

You can't do it. You can create some twisted and broken attachments, but you can't actually make someone love you through the application of power.

And though that certainly isn't all that could be said, I do think it might explain a little bit of why God doesn't always show up with fireworks. Why?

[11:04] It almost seems like he's shy sometimes in showing off power. And even when you see him in Scripture do these big miracles that are for all to behold, he doesn't do them every day.

Like, sometimes it's a long time in between them even though that's exactly what people ask for. Do that big thing like you did the last time. And if nothing else, if that's how God operates, I think it does reveal something about his goal.

Because here's the thing, if you're right, if his goal is just to get you to believe he exists, you are correct that he would have no problem convincing you of that.

He would have no problem convincing you that he exists. But, if his goal isn't that, if his goal is actually, I want to have a love relationship with you, then that would probably mean there's a different approach.

Like, I know that doesn't explain everything, it's not a fully satisfying answer, but at the very least, I would offer to you the way to a love relationship is not necessarily shock and awe.

[12:22] Which is why I don't think God uses that all the time. So, what will God do then if he's not going to show up like that? Well, God won't coerce or manipulate or violate you to get you to love him, but he will pursue you and his pursuit is furious.

And that's what I think he's trying to reveal in these parables. So, in the first parable, he tells this story of a shepherd who has a flock and one of the flock is wandered off.

And the shepherd leaves behind the 99 sheep to go find the one that is left. Now, there's so many things we could probably glean about ourselves from being compared to sheep.

And again, it's a really common motif that Jesus uses because it's one that the hearers of his time would have been really familiar with. Sheep are not known for razor wit.

They wander away very easily into dangerous situations. It's why they have a shepherd. They don't take instruction well.

[13:34] And you can actually even see that in the way he finds the sheep. And if you've read anything about, again, shepherds going to get the sheep, this is a real thing too. When he found the sheep, you couldn't just say, come home sheep, like he had to seize it and throw it on his shoulder.

Because that's the only way it was coming home. literally grab it. And that's true. Like all those things you could say are probably true about us.

But because this is a parable, again, I really don't think the focus is on the details of the sheep as much as it is on the pursuit of the shepherd.

Because the fact that the shepherd is willing to go this far to save one of the sheep, I think really shows us that God will pursue those who have wandered far away.

I think one of the things about the resolve of the shepherd is it's actually somewhat shown more in what he didn't do than what he does. Because there's so many outs we would have probably given this shepherd, right?

[14:39] So what he doesn't do is he doesn't say, sheep, so far out there. it is hot, I am not going that, that's so much trouble.

He doesn't think of the pain of what he's going to have to do to go get that sheep. He also doesn't say, well, I got 99, that's pretty good, right? Like, 99 out of 100 isn't bad, it's not worth it.

He didn't make the excuse of, I got other sheep to take care of and most of them are here, like, no. And he also didn't say, you know, if that sheep really wanted to be a part of the flock, he should have just hung out.

It's really kind of his fault that he's not here. He didn't use the he's getting what he deserved excuse. What does he do?

He goes. He leaves the 99. There is never a question because his mind is fixed, not on the 99 that are safe, but on the one that is in danger.

[15:49] And then he tells a second story which I think kind of shows the same passion that God has for what's lost. In this story, it tells of a woman who has 10 coins but she's lost one.

And it's interesting because in this story, the coin is still somewhere in the house. It's just not part of the set. But just like with the shepherd and the sheep, she is not okay with a 90% solution.

She knows every coin house value. And I think her story tells us that God also pursues those who are close at hand. Why is she not content with losing any coin?

You know, some commentators have pointed out that this actually, this image that he's given might have been a reference again that would have been more familiar to them, which was this idea of the 10 coins being her wedding dowry.

And like it's a very common practice, you would take that and make it into a necklace. So like a necklace of 10 coins that reminds her of the covenant love between her and her husband.

[17:06] I mean, you think about it like that, like you wouldn't be okay with just part of that necklace being missing. It's an image that every piece would be valuable. And so she starts searching and again, it's kind of missed on us today that like she could have just let that be, but she lights a lamp.

And again, we don't think of it like this because to us you go and flick a switch, but to create light in that time period is costly. You have to burn oil, you have to do something that costs you something to create light.

And it's interesting because again, unlike the sheep, the coin isn't far, so it would be really easy for her to just say, well, it's around here somewhere. Like I'm sure I'll run across it someday.

Morning will be here soon enough. No need to like go burn an oil over this thing, but she responds with urgency. I have to find it right now.

I think it's a picture of kingdom pursuit for those who are close to the family, close to home, but maybe far away in spirit.

[18:17] Or maybe in a place where it feels like they've been forgotten. They're present, but not really present. Not all the way here.

Listen, what I'm about to say might sound a little exaggerated, but I really believe it's true. This fellowship at City Grace and really any fellowship of any body of believers will never be as rich as it can be.

Never be as full as it can be. And never shine the light of God's truth and mercy like it could without every person here doing what God made you to do.

The Bible talks about his church like a literal body. And one that it says is diminished when it's missing pieces, right? Like when it's missing a hand or missing an eye or missing a mouth or an ear, something is lessened in the body.

I like that image of the body too because it shows us how much you treasure things because you treasure pieces of your body, right? Like this story is about ten coins, like you have ten fingers, but I imagine if somewhere today you lose one of them, your response will not be, that's totally fine, I got nine more.

[19:47] You want all ten of your fingers. I think there's also a clue in the fact that, you know, again, thinking about how God interfaces with the world, he can do that in any way he chooses to do it, but the Bible specifically tells us that one of the primary ways God wants to reveal himself to the world is through his people, through the body.

And if that's true, I mean, it really goes so far as to mean if you are a hand that's not being a hand or you are an eye that's not being an eye, there is a piece of the glory of God that this church and this world is not seeing, that I can't give them, that only you can do.

And you might not want that much weight, but that is the value that God says you have in this crazy Christian community. And look, this really isn't like a backhanded pitch to get you to serve.

Like, that's not how we do that. Like, we just very frankly, if there's a need, make it known to God's people and trust that they'll step into it. So this isn't like a way to say you really should get to serving in the church.

Like, that's not why I'm telling you that. But I also don't want to water this down. Like, we can't be what we're supposed to be without you.

[21:16] What a diminished church if it's just my voice. And it's really easy around things like this to think stuff like, well, yeah, but I can't play or sing like the people on stage, and I can't preach like

the elders do, and my community group leader is amazing.

I don't think I could ever facilitate a group like that. But this parable tells you that unequivocally every coin is valuable. And you don't stop searching just because you have nine.

If nine parts of the body are doing what they're supposed to, the other one is still sought. God is not content to just let you be a coin buried in a drawer somewhere.

That's not the destiny he wants for you. And so he pursues. And that pursuit is furious. But not only does God know how to actively pursue, I also think he knows how to do what is probably the hardest pursuing of all.

God knows how to patiently wait for those who haven't yet come home. You know the parable, the third parable in this set that he tells the Pharisees, we're actually going to read that next week because it's one of the most famous stories in history.

[22 : 42] It's widely known as the parable of the prodigal son. And that parable is so rich and so dense and so beautiful that frankly it's honestly just going to be a privilege to kind of walk through it with you next week.

But as a bit of a teaser, the opening of that parable I think also gives us some insight into pursuit. Because you see in that story, the son is left home.

He is demanded half of his father's estate to spend as he pleased and he's left home. And that's interesting because he's made it clear he doesn't want the father.

He has no intention of being at home. And what's interesting about the opening of that parable is unlike the others where the frantic search is on, got to find the sheep, got to find the coin.

In this one, the father does something really different. He waits. He knows that the son isn't ready to come home.

[23 : 53] And he knows that he can't force him or coerce him to come back. But he does long for him to come home. And he sits there and he watches every day.

And we know that because it says when the son does come home, he sees him a long way off, which means his eyes are to the horizon.

He is looking every day for the smallest sign that his son is ready to come home. And when he does, he has great rejoicing.

It was a day he waited for. And you know, in all three of these parables, and the two we just read, it tells us that the story ends with joy, with calling people to rejoice.

And what Jesus does is he's actually claiming, he says, look, I come from a kingdom community, guys, I know how it works up there. All right? And he says, the thing we celebrate in the heavenly places, the thing that really sets the party off, is a sinner saved by grace.

[25 : 07] Not a self-righteous person who doesn't think they have anything to repent of. A wanderer who's come home. That's what sets the party off.

And I think what that means for us is just a really simple message, which is, friend, you're not too far away. Like, if you want to be found, Jesus is looking for you.

I mean, if you feel like you've been forgotten and you don't want to be anymore, Jesus is pursuing you. And particularly if you're in a place where you want to come home but you're not sure you can, not after what I've done, then hear me.

on the authority of Jesus himself, I tell you this. If you want to come home, you can come home.

The Father is watching the horizon right now.

You're not too far away. Make his joy complete. As the band comes up today, a couple of really simple ways to respond.

[26 : 25] If you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus, I know this is not the message that our world and our society sends you, but it is the one that Jesus would send and that's simply this.

You are loved and you are pursued. Even if you think you don't have value or that the whole world has forgotten you, God has not.

And you can come home. Maybe you don't even know what that concept means. You just know you don't feel like you fit or you don't feel like you're home. But God says there is a home and you can come near.

And you know, another key to it that I think we get from this story of the prodigal son is like, don't try to clean up before you come. Like, don't try to get the pig smell off of you.

It says, when he realized that he could come home, he stood up and started walking. Because he knows that the Father is going to receive him.

[27 : 28] Jesus is the friend of sinners because he longs to help the sick who need a doctor.

He makes broken things new. He is not waiting for you with a paddle and a I told you so. He wants you to come home. If you are a follower of Jesus, God doesn't stop pursuing you when you belong to him.

If anything, he is more jealous for those who are called by his name. And again, I think this is just one of those places where you can ask God to help you.

Like, whatever you feel about yourself, God says, you were made to shine like a star. And the sky is not complete until you are shining in it.

So before we take communion, it's just, it's a place to stop and just thank God that he pursues us and he keeps pursuing us. It's a place, if you don't feel like you're shining or you feel like you're the coin lost in a drawer, God, how do I step into that?

[28 : 43] And then when you're ready, we come to the communion table. Communion is a place where we remember, you know, Jesus went the whole way to make this community possible.

Again, if you have any doubt about how much his pursuit entails, he pursued to the very end. To the very end. And it should make us confident when we come, not guilty, it should make us confident that not only are we grateful and overwhelmed by what he's done, but he wanted us with him that much.

Like he wants you at the table with him. And so we come in fellowship and let that speak to your soul. Father, we give you this moment of communion.

communion. Holy Spirit, please come and be in this place. Do what only you can do. We give this time to you in Jesus' name.

Father, who knew who knew who knew who knew who knew who knew who knew who knew who knew who knew who knew who knew